

WildSafeBC District of Tumbler Ridge Annual Report 2020

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC District of Tumbler Ridge Program between May 1st and October 30th, 2020. This WildSafeBC program was delivered in the Tumbler Ridge townsite and surrounding trails, campgrounds, and recreational sites (Figure 1). WildSafeBC recognizes the traditional territory of the Dunne-za First Nations in this program area.

The District of Tumbler Ridge (DTR) had another active year with regards to wildlife. There were 69 wildlife reports in the DTR to date this year. Black bears were the top reported species and reports spiked in September, with garbage and fruit being the main attractants noted. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), Rebecca Robertson, performed outreach activities 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.

One of the modified programs was the WildSafe Rangers Program, which was presented both to the Summer Reading Club at the Tumbler Ridge Public Library, and by Zoom webinar to 10 different classes with a total of 150 children and teachers participating. Other presentations included 4 socially-distanced wildlife safety and bear spray presentations given to about 60 people. These presentations were conducted at the Tumbler Ridge Visitor's Centre in partnership with the Tumbler Ridge Global GeoPark and Visit Tumbler Ridge prior to guided hikes and also included the 5th annual BC Goes Wild event.

Other key highlights from 2020 included the continuation of community education programs such as bin tagging and the distribution of door hangers to 700 residences. A total of 254 bins received education stickers. The public also received information about efforts to decrease human-wildlife conflict through articles in the local newspaper *Tumbler RidgeLines*, and the WildSafeBC District of Tumbler Ridge Facebook Page, which increased its "likes" by almost 20% and had a post reach of over 34,000.

New to the WildSafeBC District of Tumbler Ridge program is the WildSafe Business Pledge and the Bare Camping initiative. The Business Pledge was signed by six businesses in town and the Bare Camping initiative was introduced to one campground in town, which plans to pursue the Bare Camping Program next year.

As another successful season draws to a close, WildSafeBC would like to thank our sponsors for continued support of this program. We look forward to continuing community education in 2021 and working together to keep "wildlife wild and our community safe".



Figure 1. Map of WildSafeBC program coverage for the District of Tumbler Ridge.

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Cover Photo: The WCC conducted garbage bin tagging by placing a highly visible and removable sticker onto bins set out the night before collection. Of the residences whose bins were tagged once, 85% did not place their bin out early on the curb again.

Highlights from the 2020 Season

Wildlife Activity

The District of Tumbler Ridge (DTR) had another active year with regards to wildlife. Wildlife reports are made to the Conservation Officer Service’s RAPP line and uploaded daily to WildSafeBC’s Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). From January 1st to October 30th, 2020, there were 69 wildlife reports in the DTR. Black bears were by far the top species reported (Figure 2). Of the 69 reports, 77% were black bear, 13% were grizzly bear, 3% were deer, 1% were cougar, and 6% of the reports were regarding other wildlife such as coyotes, and raptors. An important note is that one of the black bears being reported in 2020 was a cinnamon-coloured black bear which was likely mistakenly reported as a grizzly bear several times.

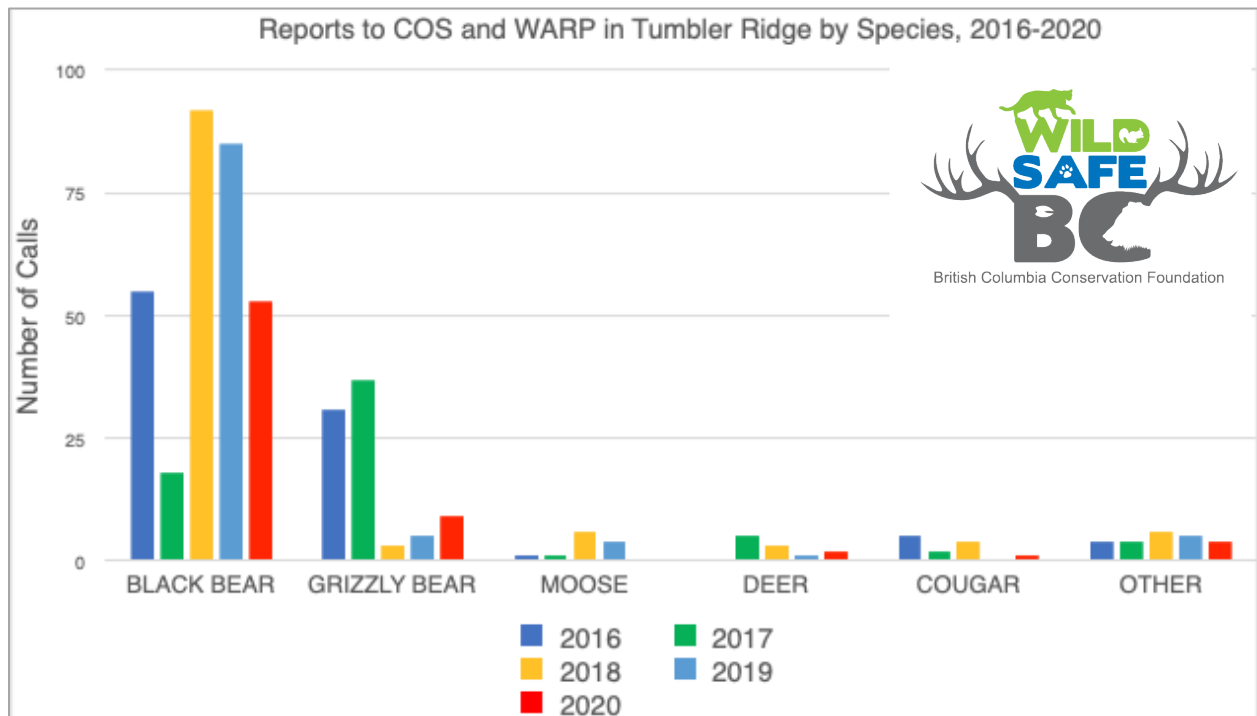


Figure 2. Reports to COS and WARP regarding wildlife in Tumbler Ridge from January 1, 2016 to October 30, 2020. Black bears accounted for 77% of the reports (53 out of 69) in 2020.

In 2020, black bear reports spiked in September, breaking the trend of the previous two years when reports peaked in July (Figure 3). This may reflect the large crop of crab-apples this year that ripened in September and may have led to the food-conditioning of several bears in the area.

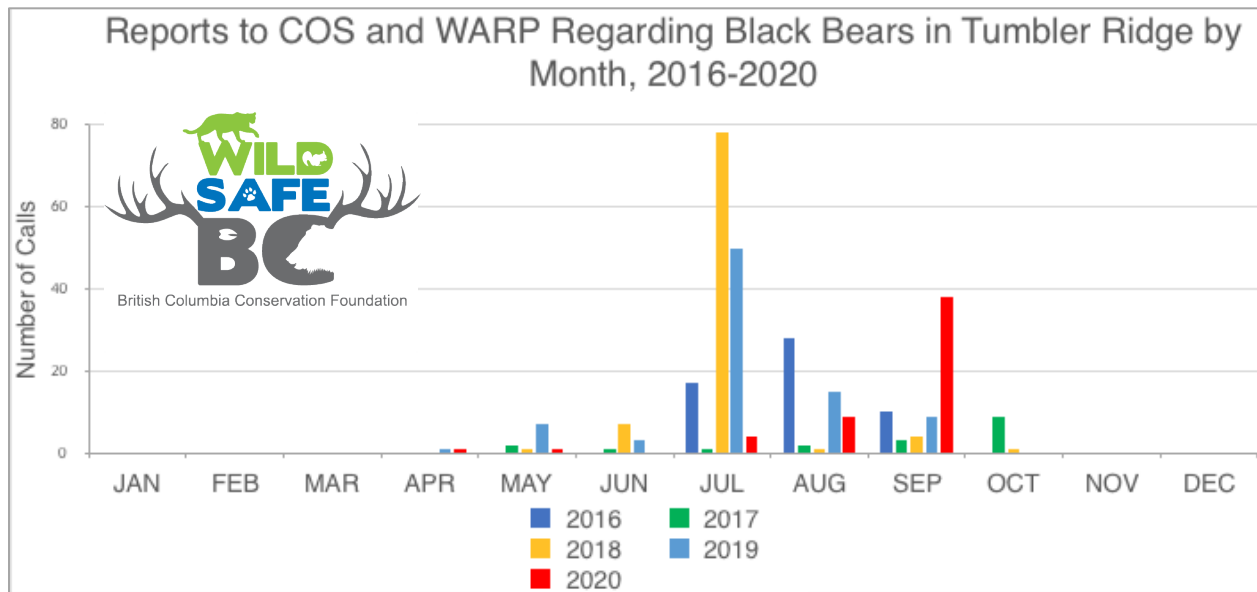


Figure 3. Reports to COS and WARP regarding black bears in Tumbler Ridge from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020. Black bear reports in 2020 peaked in September with 38 reports out of a total of 53 reports during the course of the year.

Increased bear conflicts in the fall are typical across British Columbia, driven by bears' need for large amounts of calories prior to hibernation as well as the availability of unmanaged attractants such as fruit trees. As the bears go into their dens in October and November, the conflict numbers tend to taper off.

In Tumbler Ridge, there were 53 black bear reports so far in 2020 which is lower than the four year average of 63. Garbage was the most reported attractant, with 12 reported cases of bears accessing garbage to date this year (Figure 4). Garbage was followed by fruit trees (3 reports), other attractants (3 reports), and livestock (1 report).

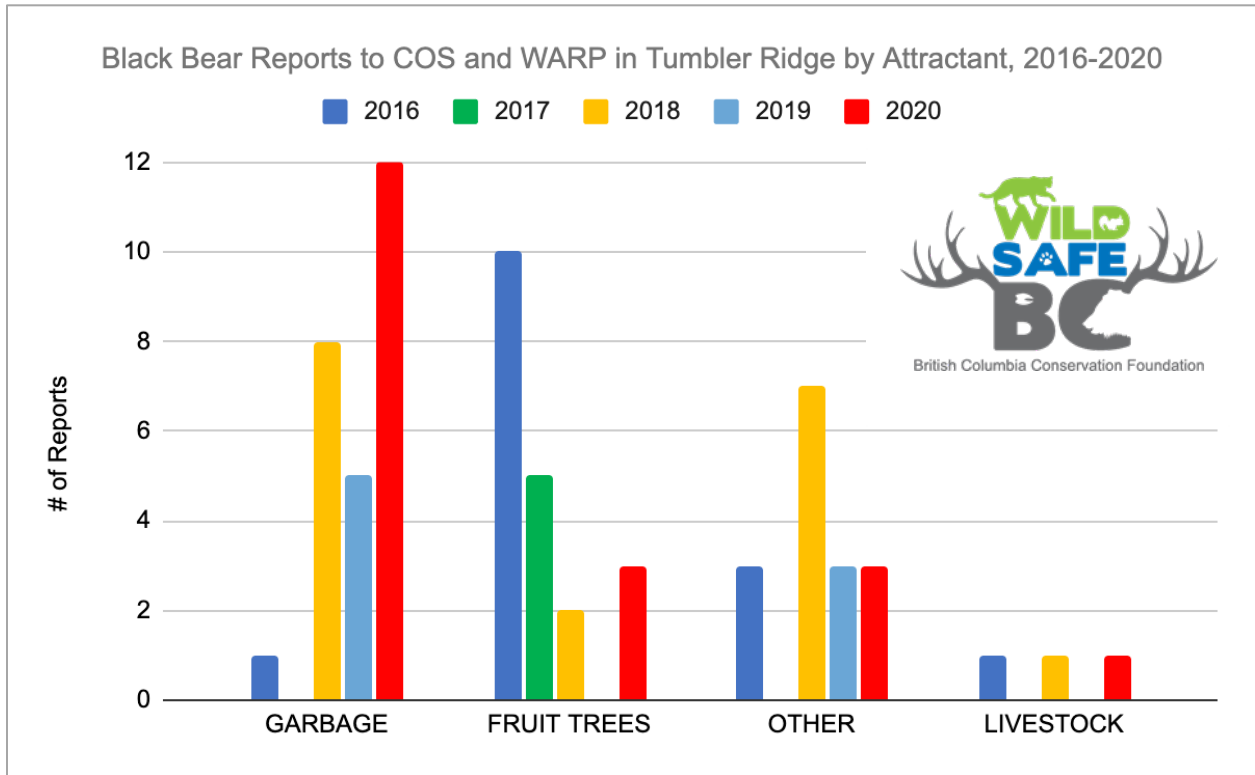


Figure 4. The top black bear attractants reported in the DTR from January 1, 2016 to September 30, 2020. Garbage accounted for more than 60% of the reported attractants in 2020. Other attractants in 2020 were fruit trees (16%) and residential livestock (5%). A further 16% of reports were of other types of attractants such as compost, BBQs, pets, etc.

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 Rangers Program

One of the modified programs this year was the WildSafe Rangers Program, which was presented by webinar via Zoom instead of directly in the classroom (Figure 5a). This program was presented to 10 different classes at Tumbler Ridge Elementary School in Grades K-4. A total of 150 children and teachers became WildSafe Rangers and received kits. The presentations in June had less participation, as classes generally had very few students

because many children were still learning from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the presentations both in the spring and fall were all very well received and engagement with students was successful even in this new online format.



Figure 5. (a) The WildSafe Rangers program was filmed and included in “camping week” at the Tumbler Ridge Public Library’s Summer Reading Club (pictured on left). Photo Credit: Chris Norbury. (b) It was also adapted to be presented virtually through Zoom to 150 students at Tumbler Ridge Elementary School (pictured on right). Photo Credit: Anne Prins

In addition to the school presentations, the WildSafe Ranger Program was also delivered to the Tumbler Ridge Library Summer Reading Club. This presentation was filmed and then uploaded to the Summer Reading Club website as part of their “camping week” theme (Figure 5b).

Presentations to Community Groups and BC Goes Wild Event

The WCC gave a total of four Wildlife Safety and Bear Spray presentations, which were all very well received. These were offered at the Tumbler Ridge Visitor’s Centre with about 60 people participating altogether (Table 1). These presentations were conducted before guided hikes that were led and advertised by the Tumbler Ridge Global GeoPark and Visit Tumbler Ridge. The presentations were given to small groups to allow for social distancing.

Table 1. Wildlife Safety and the use of Bear Spray presentations given during the 2020 season. The # of participants was limited due to the need for social-distancing.

Date	Partner Organization	Event	# of Participants
24 July, 2020	Tumbler Ridge Global GeoPark	Teepee Falls guided hike	11
10 Aug, 2020	Visit Tumbler Ridge	Boulder Gardens guided hike	7
22 Aug, 2020	Visit Tumbler Ridge	Mount Kostuik guided hike	10
5 Sept, 2020	Tumbler Ridge Global GeoPark	BC Goes Wild	25

In addition to these partnered presentations, WildSafeBC District of Tumbler Ridge held the 5th annual BC Goes Wild event on September 5th at the Visit Tumbler Ridge Info Centre (Figure 6). The WCC teamed up with the Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark to host a display booth, a wildlife safety information talk, a bear spray demonstration, and a nature walk. The event was advertised on local Facebook pages and with posters at businesses around town. There was considerable interest, and a second presentation was added to accommodate everyone. Altogether 25 people participated in the event. Feedback was positive and participants expressed gratitude for an opportunity to learn more about wildlife and safety.



Figure 6. Participants at the BC Goes Wild event watch the WCC's presentation on wildlife safety. Photo Credit: Jenna McQueen

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education was modified this year to consist of leaving door hangers that included the 'Top 10 Ways to Help Wildlife' as well as a letter to residents outlining local bylaws and bear activity (Figure 7). These materials were delivered to every house and trailer on the lower and upper benches and left on front doors instead of the WCC knocking as has been done in the past. A total of 700 residences received a door hanger and residents who were already outdoors were engaged in relevant conversations about strategies to keep wildlife wild and our community safe.



Figure 7. The WCC delivered 700 door hangers to homes in the DTR.

Bin tagging was conducted for the entire community of Tumbler Ridge once each month during June, July, and August. Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the night before collection. During nine outings between the times of 10pm and 1am, a total of 254 bins were tagged in the DTR. Of these tagged bins, approximately 25% were improperly clipped (one or two of the clips were not secured), and 36 bins were tagged more than once (Figure 8). The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours is demonstrated by 85% of the residences whose bins were tagged once and did not place their bin out early on the curb again. Additionally, there was a 60% decrease in bins put out the night before collection between the June and August surveys.

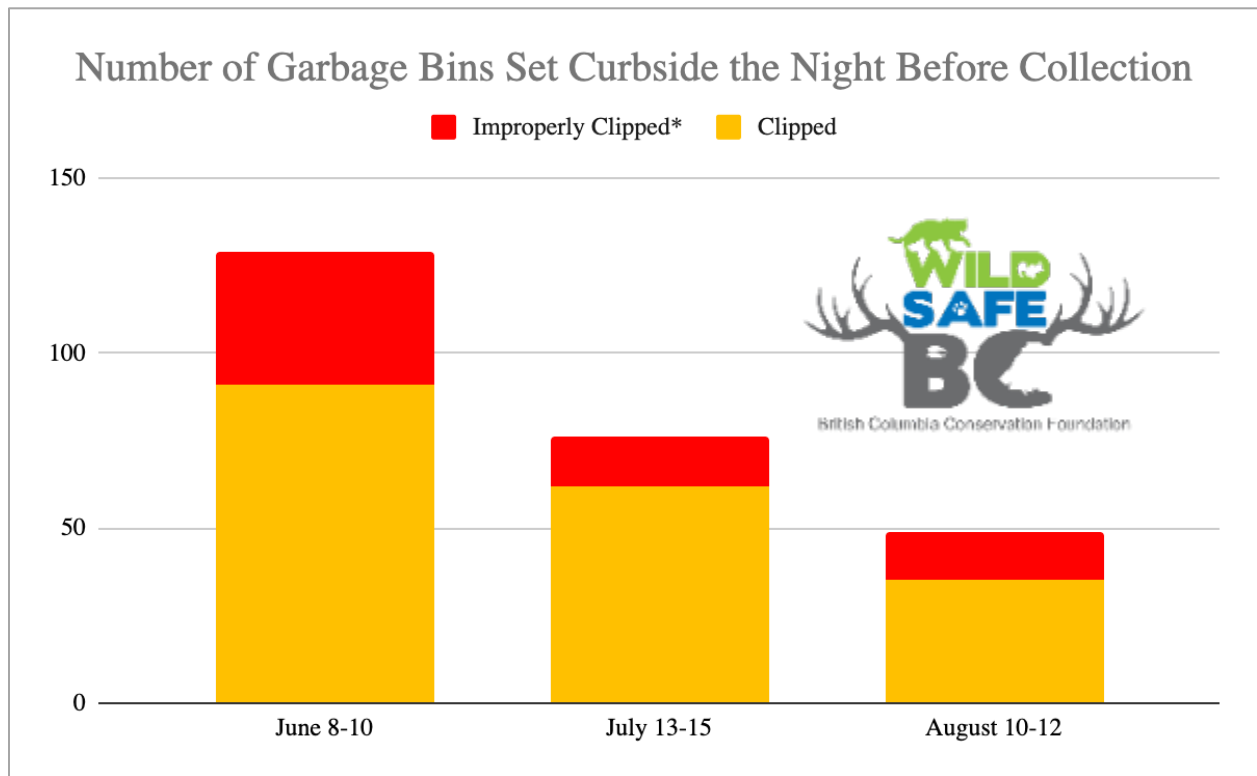


Figure 8. The number of carts placed out early and tagged.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC District of Tumbler Ridge Facebook page grew nearly 20% in 2020 from 425 to 516 page likes, with a post reach of over 34,000. Consistent activity of at least 3 posts a week from May through October helped to reinforce messaging and provided opportunities for discussing relevant wildlife issues.

The WCC submitted four news articles to the local paper *Tumbler RidgeLines* throughout the 2020 season. Topics included the purpose of the WildSafeBC Program, managing attractants, wildlife safety, and the use of bear spray (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Four articles were published in the local paper Tumbler RidgeLines including the pictured piece about wildlife safety and the use of bear spray.

Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife in Area signs were displayed around the DTR by the WCC throughout the 2020 season, especially during times of peak bear activity. The areas that required the most signage were the entrances to the popular Tumbler Point Trail located near the Lower Bench, the intersection of Murray Drive and Mackenzie Way along the popular Mackenzie Way walking path, and playgrounds in the near vicinity of recent bear sightings (Figure 10). Unfortunately over the course of the season many of the signs were destroyed or stolen and required replacement.



Figure 10. Bear in Area signs were displayed at popular trailheads, in residential neighborhoods with high bear activity, and near playgrounds with recent bear sightings in the vicinity.

WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to be 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 provides ongoing support to the business in the form of staff training, WildSafeBC materials (subject to budget constraints) and a WildSafeBC Business Pledge poster. A total of six businesses signed the pledge this year in the DTR including Trend Mountain Hotel, FreshMart Grocery, KC's Dollar Store, the Tumbler Ridge Public Library, Tumbler Ridge Pharmacy, and Home Hardware (Figure 11). Two other businesses expressed interest in pursuing this designation next year.



Figure 11. KC's Dollar Store was one of the local businesses to sign the Business Pledge in 2020. They now display WildSafeBC signage with their bear spray, distribute brochures, and collect empty bear spray canisters.

WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

The WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program is a new initiative in 2020. Through the program, WildSafeBC is able to provide clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. One campsite in Tumbler Ridge has expressed interest in implementing Bare Campsite training next year.

Bear Smart Designation

A Bear Hazard Assessment was completed in 2019, however a proposal to Town Council regarding the pursuit of Bear Smart status was rejected. In 2020, a focus was put on continuing the work of WildSafeBC while looking for ways to increase effectiveness and work with new bylaws being put in place over the course of the summer. A Bear Working Group consisting of local stakeholders was formed and met once to discuss locally relevant strategies to decrease human-wildlife conflict in the DTR.

Challenges and Opportunities

Garbage and fruit trees continue to be sources of attractants in the community that draw wildlife into residential areas. This year two bears became food-conditioned after accessing attractants and had to be destroyed. Bears were reported displaying human-habituated behaviour such as hanging around backyards, looking into residential windows, and accessing garbage bins and fruit trees near homes.

To address the abundance of crab-apples that ripen every year in September, a community solution involving food sharing through Social Media and fruit gleaning groups should be encouraged. Education and enforcement of local bylaws that prohibit the accumulation of fruit should also continue to help prevent future human-wildlife conflict.

Furthermore, changes to garbage pick-up and garbage bylaws will need to be addressed in 2021. Garbage collection will be switching to biweekly pick-up instead of weekly pick-up and will be alternating with recycling - a new program in the DTR. Additionally, the bylaw that prevented residents from placing their bins curbside the night before collection was repealed in September and now allows residents to put bins out as of 6pm the night before collection. The WCC will need to continue to encourage residents to follow WildSafe practices while also recognizing these recent changes.

Acknowledgements

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