

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2020

North Cascades

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC (WSBC) North Cascades Program between May 25th and October 30th, 2020. The purpose of the program was to provide education and human-wildlife conflict mitigation solutions within Manning Provincial Park (Figure 1). This included providing education to day use and overnight visitors to Coldspring, Lightning Lake, Hampton and Mule Deer Campgrounds. The program also worked closely with the Park Operator, Manning Park Resort and BC Parks to collaborate on reducing sources of bear conflicts identified in the Bear Hazard Assessment (Glasser and Hamilton, 2019).

While many animals were spotted this season, human-wildlife conflict reports remained low. The WildSafeBC North Cascades Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of educating the public to stay safe on the trails and prevent conflict with wildlife in the campground. In collaboration with the Manning Resort Interpretive Program, the WildSafeBC Program presentations were modified to follow COVID-19 safety precautions and ensure proper sanitation, physical distancing measures and limit attendance to 50 at public event presentations. Despite these restrictions, the program still succeeded in reaching 342 people over 8 presentations. In addition, booths were set up at popular trailheads and the WCC interacted with 892 people. The WCC visited individual campsites and spoke with 1,148 campers.

Along with educating the public, the WCC visited the staff housing area and noted bears had frequented the area in the spring. Recommendations were made and improvements to attractant management took place over the season. The WCC met with the General Manager of Manning Park Resorts to offer solutions and further training. However, the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 made this very challenging to pursue this season.

Recommendations for next season include wildlife awareness and safety training for staff as well as piloting WildSafeBC's new Bare Campsite Program. This newly designed program is based on the successful Bare Campsite Program established by Parks Canada in the early 1990's and that has been very successful at reducing conflicts with bears and other wildlife.

The WildSafeBC North Cascades Program was made possible by funding from the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development and made successful through the collaboration with BC Parks and Manning Park Resort.

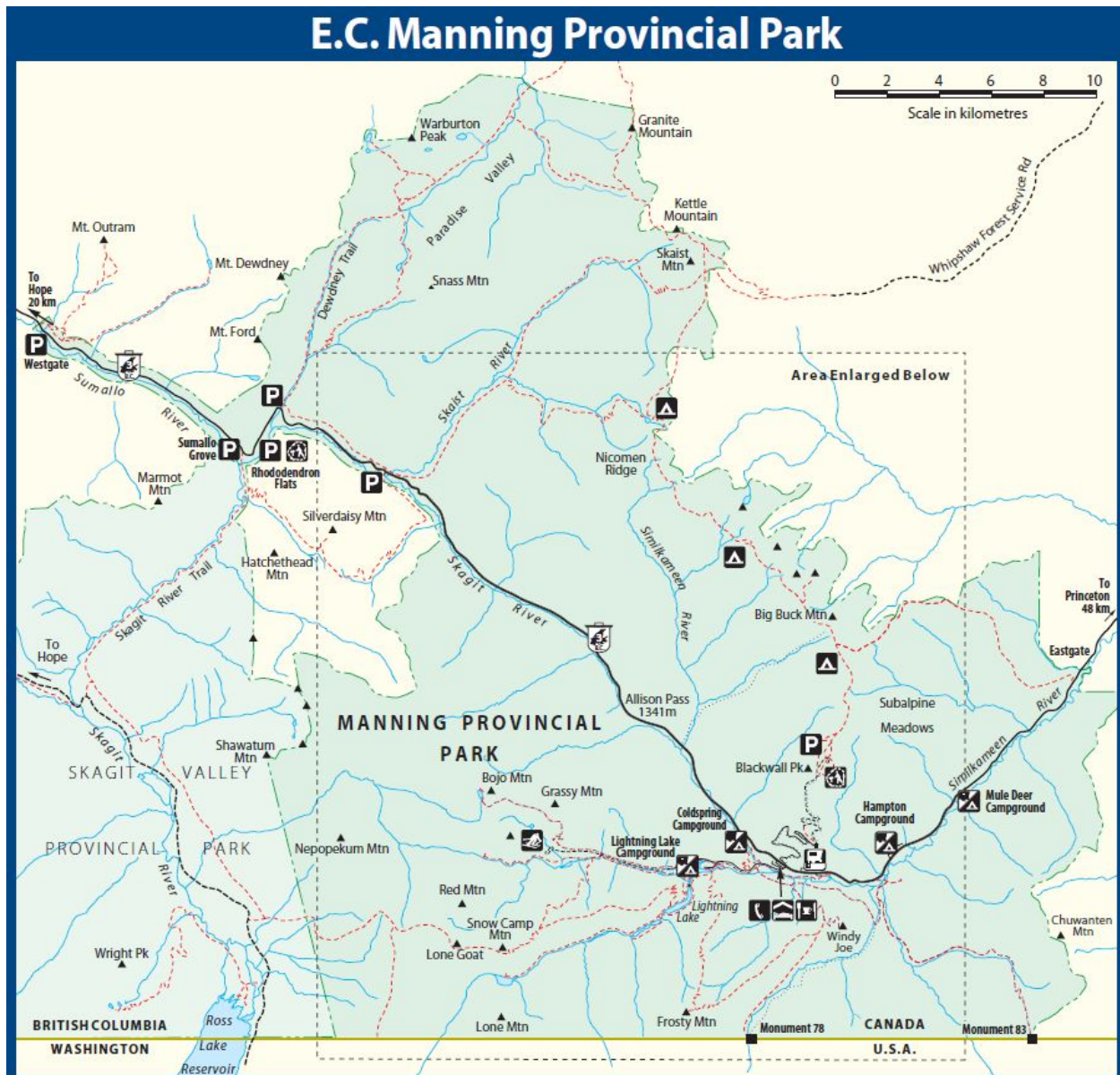


Figure 1. WildSafeBC North Cascades program covers Manning Park Provincial Park.

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Cover Photo: WildSafeBC Presentation by Carolyn Blank at Lightning Lake Amphitheatre in E.C. Manning Park on August 13th, 2020.

Highlights from the 2020 Season

Wildlife Activity

An abundant snowpack and cool June resulted in a slow snowmelt of the area limiting foraging areas for emerging bears to lower in the valley. The province was also currently experiencing the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic shutdown and many of the campgrounds were closed early in the season. Once restrictions lifted, and day use areas and campgrounds reopened, visitors came in high numbers throughout July and August. Black bears were seen during the entire summer, often near water or eating the greenery along the side of the road (Figure 2). Everyone stayed safe this year with the most serious human-wildlife conflict resulting from vehicle accidents along Hwy 3.



Figure 2. Black bear on the side of Gibson Pass Road at midday, just past the entrance to Lightning Lake Campground.

Presentations to Community Groups

E.C. Manning Park Lightning Lake Campground has amazing infrastructure and audience reach through their Manning Lodge interpretive program and outdoor amphitheatre for public presentations. The manager of the interpretive program, Joanne Hughes, was instrumental in the success of the presentations by allowing the WCC to use the stage with the projector screen and sound system. She provided an interpretive staff member, Eva, to help set up and direct the public in safe COVID-19 seating arrangements for every presentation. She also advertised the WSBC presentation dates and times on the Manning Park Resort weekly events calendar throughout the park on billboards, at the visitor centre, on their website, and through their social media. Events were limited to 48 public members and 2 staff to stay within Provincial guidelines and orders. Many of these events were very popular and people were turned away once attendance limits were reached. In all, 342 people were reached over 8 presentations. The presentations consisted of a 40 minute Powerpoint presentation where the audience was provided an overview of wildlife in Manning Park, human-wildlife conflict causes and mitigation, as well as safety best practices (Figure 3). This included keeping safe distances from wild

animals, hiking in groups, making noise, and recognizing signs of wildlife. The WCC used wildlife skulls and antlers to talk about the life and diet of bears, ungulates and cougars. The habitat needs of wildlife was then connected to reducing conflict with wildlife while camping and at home. In the event of an undesirable encounter with these three types of animals, the audience was walked through how to react and use bear spray as a last resort. To provide context, the presentation also reviewed statistic with regards to how infrequently people are killed or injured by predators. However, safety and conflict reduction remains a priority to keep wildlife wild and campgrounds and communities safe.

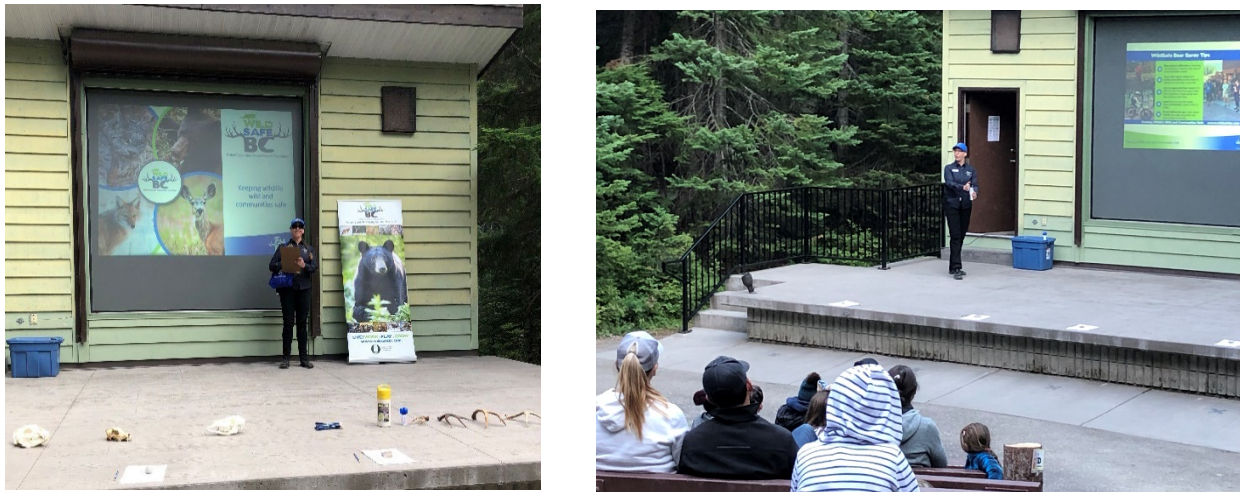


Figure 3. Presentations at the amphitheatre in Lightning Lake Campground

At the end of each presentation, participants were encouraged to complete a feedback survey. WildSafeBC Ranger pencils were given away to avoid COVID-19 transmission and as a thank you. A total of 18 surveys were completed. All respondents stated that they enjoyed the presentation and would recommend it to others. As well, the survey asked what new behaviours they would adopt after the presentation (Table 1).

Table 1. Survey respondents indicating new behaviours they would adopt after receiving a WildSafeBC Presentation

New Behaviour to be Adopted after Presentation	Number of Respondents
Carry bear spray more often	7
Make noise, especially with my voice, when travelling on foot/bike	10
Take down my bird feeder from April to December	5
Take down my bird feeder indefinitely	1
Call the Conservation Officer Service to report danger wildlife in an urban area or in conflict	7
Sign up for the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program	4
Never feed wildlife	6
Remove my fruit tree or manage it carefully so as not to attract wildlife	1

Display Booths

The WSBC display booth is a popular attraction with engaging information such as wildlife props and informative graphics and brochures. The booth was set up at popular trailheads over 8 days with 7 at the Lightning Lake trail head in the day use area and 1 at the Manning Park Lodge for a total reach of 892 people.

Campsite Education

The WCC visited people directly at their campsites and spoke with 1,148 people at the Mule Deer, Hampton, Coldwater and Lightning Lake campgrounds. The visits promoted “Bare Campsite” best practices and the WCC was well-prepared with other WSBC education materials. Many families appreciated the wildlife brochures and campers were keen to learn more about what attracts bears. The WCC learned that many people tenting were often unfamiliar with the term “greywater” for dirty dishwater. As well, many were surprised to learn that recyclables, scented candles, BBQs, deodorant or suntan lotion were bear attractants. Most understood that coolers, food, garbage and pet food were wildlife attractants. However, it wasn’t always clear to them the best way to keep them secure was in a vehicle or trailer and that this was important even when they were away from the campsite for short periods. Some campers believed that placing rocks on their coolers would be sufficient. The occasional campsite would have benefited from an educational campsite follow-up (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Examples of unattended campsites that would benefit from follow-up education.

Staff Housing

In the spring, staff housing had conflicts with a bear. The WCC noted that there were many outdoor non bear-resistant garbage cans and an outdoor freezer. The WCC spoke with the Manning Park Lodge Manager who indicated they were working on long-term solutions to address their aging infrastructure. The WCC did observe noticeable improvements over the summer with the removal of the outdoor freezer and approximately 80% of the outdoor garbage cans from around staff residences.

Social Media and Press

Manning Park Resort supported the WSBC program through their website, Facebook and Instagram pages by posting WSBC activities and events happening in the Park (Figure 5). This included listings on their interpretive program events calendar. WSBC brochures were made available in the visitor centre and posters were put up on park info boards such as Rein Orchard

trailhead, amphitheatre, Lightning Lake campground, Spruce Bay, Manning Park Lodge, Monument 83 trailhead and the visitor centre.

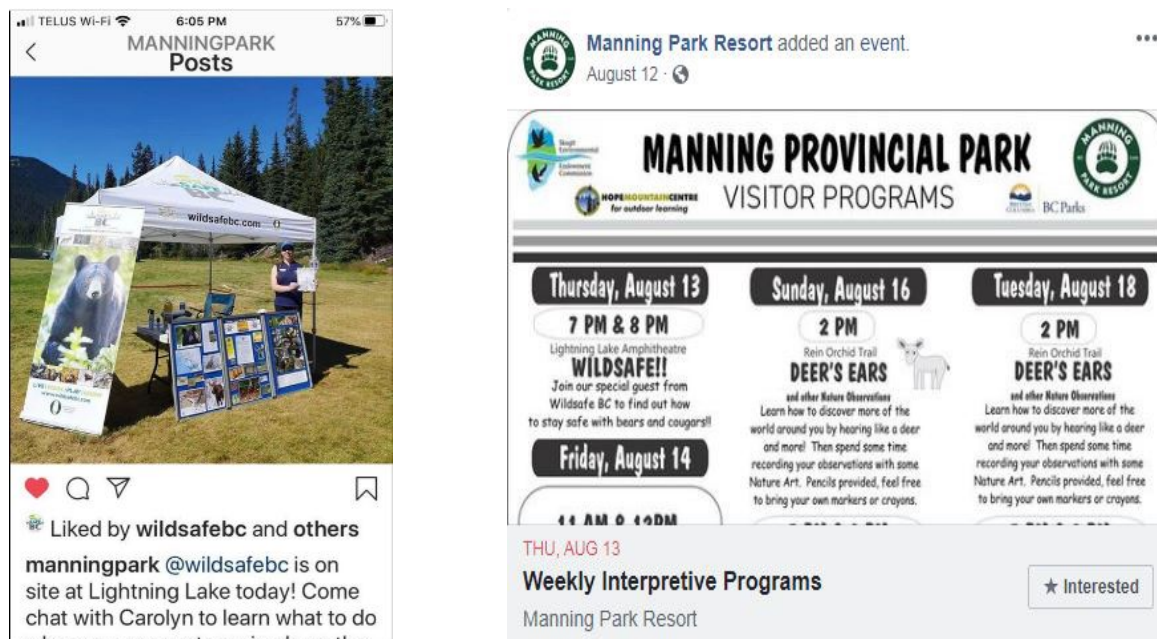


Figure 5. Social media posts about WildSafeBC activities in Manning Park.

WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

Camping in wildlife country brings unique challenges to keeping attractants secure and reducing conflicts with wildlife. WildSafeBC's Bare Campsite Program (WBCP) has been developed to support campground operators and staff with resources and training in order to reduce conflicts with bears and other wildlife at their facilities.

It is based on Bare Campsite Program that was successfully implemented in the 1990s by Parks Canada. This successfully reduced the numbers of bears that became food-conditioned and has saved the lives of many bears. In addition, the campgrounds are safer and a more enjoyable experience for all. Successful implementation of the Bare Campsite Program involves taking the following steps:

5 Steps for Success

1. Create clear expectations before campers arrive and make them aware that they are going to a WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program (WBCP) campground.
2. Repeat WBCP information when they arrive and during their stay.
3. Have WBCP bear-resistant infrastructure.
4. Provide WBCP training to staff.
5. Review campsites and detect concerns before wildlife does.

Resources

In addition to training for staff, WildSafeBC has created several resources to support operators in educating their visitors and for training their staff. This includes:

- Training Manual
- Examples of Bare Campsite Permits
- Camping in Wildlife Country Poster
- At Risk Vs Bare Campsite
- At Risk Vs Bare Picnic Site
- WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Review Card
- WildSafeBC Wildlife in Area Signs
- WildSafeBC Bare Camping Brochure

This season was especially challenging to implement a new program. However, after doing over 1,000 campsite visits, it was clear that visitors to Manning Park would benefit from the education this program provides. In addition, it was noted that motorcycle visitors that arrive to the Park do not have a secure food storage option. Also, Coldspring campground does not currently have greywater disposal sites and therefore campground users dispose food-contaminated water near their campsite.

Challenges and Opportunities

With the onset of COVID-19, there were fewer international visitors to Manning Park but increased use by BC residents, many who were exploring BC Parks for the first time. As a result, some were not aware of the number and variety of species in the Park. Other day use area visitors came from areas that did not have bears or other potentially dangerous wildlife. When information about how to behave around wildlife is not easy to recall, people can become alarmed and/or behave in ways that put themselves and animals at risk. High risk behaviors can include feeding wildlife, getting too close to wildlife, running away from predators (eliciting a chase response) and/or leaving food and other attractants accessible. Increased education through signage and staff would be helpful in educating the public.

Another challenge for the E.C. Manning Park community is its remote location and limited resources for solid waste and recycling. Some of the infrastructure is aging and not addressing growing solid waste management issues. This results in challenges for staff and added expense. When bins are full or overflowing, they fail to latch properly and the public will leave attractants on the ground next to the bins. Using bin decals to remind the public about the dangers of leaving attractants out may be helpful as well as reviewing solid waste collection schedules.

In addition, many of the resort staff members are new year-to-year and may come from countries or areas where predators may not be present. Many expressed either a fear of local wildlife or were not aware of the issues attractants or feeding wildlife pose.

Resort and campground staff would benefit from receiving Wildlife Awareness and Safety training by WSBC so that they:

- Are more aware of local wildlife and potential causes of conflict or safety hazards
- Are more knowledgeable on how to avoid and react during a wildlife encounter
- Better informed to be proactive in terms of wildlife attractants

- Better prepared to provide accurate information to the public
- Understand the protocols for reporting wildlife sightings and conflicts

Ongoing support for a WSBC Program and the pilot of the Bare Campsite Program also has the opportunity to provide the guidance and training needed to help campground staff and public learn about local wildlife and reduce conflicts. In addition staff housing could also benefit from door-to-door education visits from WSBC.

Acknowledgements

The WCC is grateful for the generous support of the Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development and the BC Conservation Foundation for making this program possible. A huge thank you to Jo Hughes and Eva from the Manning Park Resort Interpretive program for all your help in putting on the WSBC presentations. Thank you Kevin Wilson, BC Parks and Vern Schram, Manning Park Resort General Manager, for your time and knowledge.

Literature Cited

Glasser, Cailyn, and Tony Hamilton. 2019. 2018 Bear Hazard Assessment: E.C. Manning and Cathedral Lakes Provincial Parks. Okanagan Nation Alliance.