

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2020

## Town of Princeton

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## Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) for the WildSafeBC (WSBC) Princeton Program between May 1<sup>st</sup> and October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. It includes the highlights and challenges of delivering the program to the Town of Princeton's residents with the goal of preventing human-wildlife conflict in the community. The Town is surrounded by forests and ranch land and a diversity of wildlife passes through the community (Figure 1).

This 2020 season, there were 111 wildlife reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS). Deer were the most reported animal at 51 reports. The majority of those reports were for injured animals. The second most reported animal was 44 black bears with half of those reports being associated with an attractant, mostly garbage. There were 4 cougars reported, including one removed by the RCMP that was lingering near homes. Leading up to this event there were multiple anecdotal reports of missing house pets. Through conversations with the public, the WCC heard about an increase in human-wildlife conflict with raccoons, coyotes and rats.

Outreach activities in the Town of Princeton were delayed and limited due to uncertainty and safety concerns around the COVID-19 pandemic however, WildSafeBC was able to modify the program to deliver it safely and effectively. A total of 9 WildSafe Ranger presentations were given to 258 people in our local schools, 211 households were reached with door-to-door education, 482 conversations were held via email and Facebook messenger, and 94 garbage bins were tagged with educational stickers. The WCC reached 132 people at the display booth in front of Town Hall in June and 2 campsites participated in the Bare Campsite Program. The BC Goes Wild scavenger hunt was well received and many people requested that it happen again next year. Over 35 people picked up scavenger hunt forms and 9 completed forms were submitted for the prize draw. The event also generated a lot of activity on the WildSafeBC Princeton Facebook page, which doubled in followers and posts reached 31,582 people during the season.

While talking with the community this season, the WCC noted that there was an increased awareness that attractants lead to human-wildlife conflict and understanding that there is a shared responsibility of living in an area with wildlife. It is wonderful to see neighbors helping each other. There is still more education to be done for a small number of people who have not gained this understanding or are having difficulty finding alternative solutions for their current lifestyle. The intentional and unintentional feeding of wildlife, garbage storage in the community, and improper management of fruit trees has led to continued conflicts in the community.

Fantastic commitment and contributions have been made this year with the Homeowner's Checklist mailed out to all residences, purchase of 16 bear-resistant garbage bins for our parks and walking trails, implementation of Wildlife Attractant Bylaw #985, and donations of items and space for the BC Goes Wild scavenger hunt. These great strides were made possible by funding from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the BC Conservation Foundation, and the Town of Princeton. The WCC is grateful for the efforts of Town employees, the Mayor, Council, and other dedicated residents. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help to keep wildlife wild and our community safe.

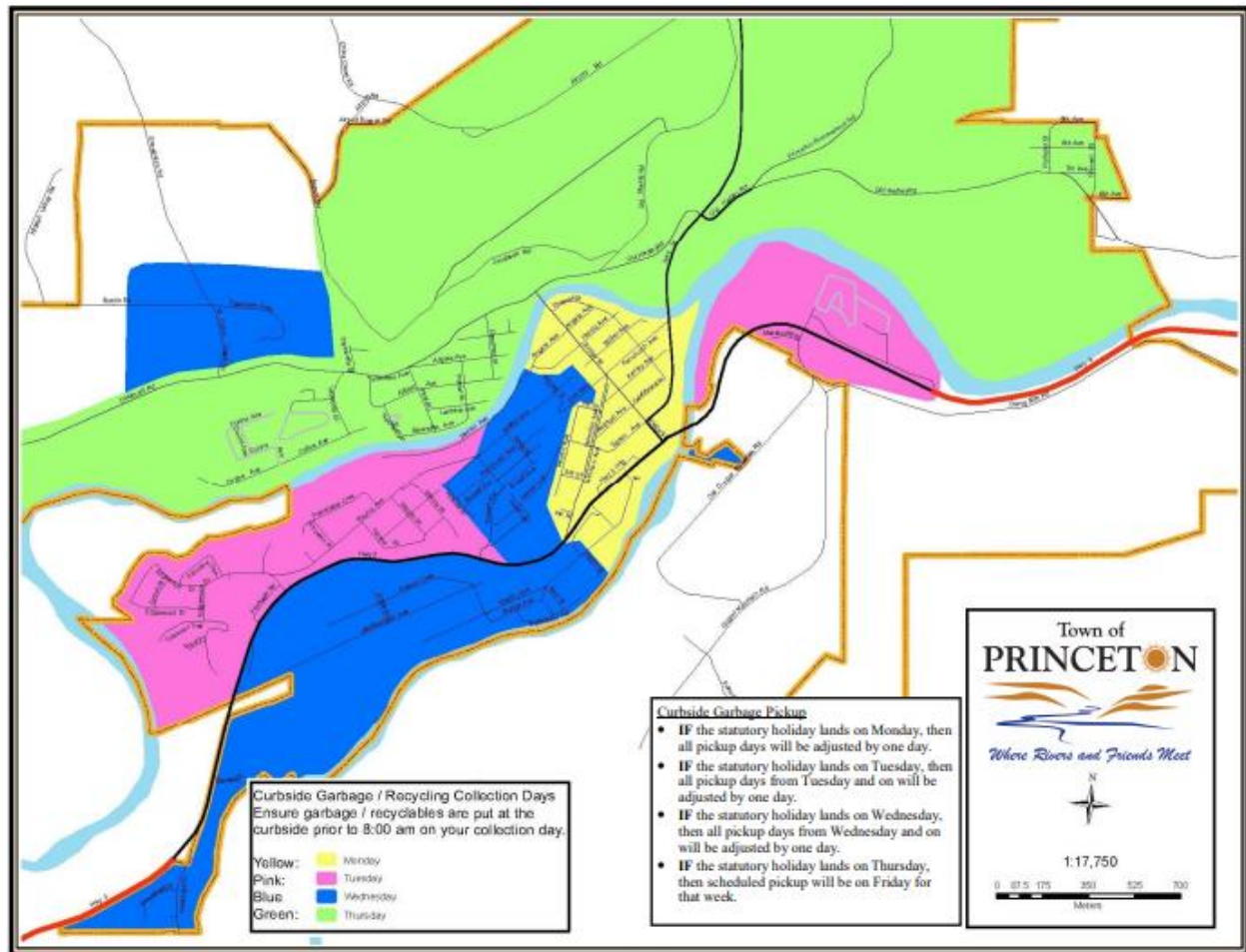


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Town of Princeton program coverage area with garbage pick-up schedule.

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**Cover Photo:** The WCC poses with the with BC Goes Wild September Scavenger Hunt winners in front of Princeton Visitor Centre.

## Highlights from the 2020 Season

### Wildlife Activity

Princeton is surrounded by an abundance of wildlife. A total of 111 reports were made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) regarding bobcat, deer, lynx, elk, black bear, cougar and moose between January 1<sup>st</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. These reports are made through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) or online form (<https://forms.gov.bc.ca/environment/rapp/>), and are available to the public through WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). Anecdotally there were many additional encounters with black bears, cougars, coyotes, raccoons and rats.

January reports included two reports of either a bobcat or lynx attracted to chickens. This is a reminder to keep attractants secure year-round. Also, there were five elk were reports throughout the year as injured/distressed or killed. This is often the result of collisions with vehicles when the local herds cross the road or highway. In addition, one moose was reported walking through town.

This season, there were four cougar reports to the COS, which resulted in one animal being destroyed by the RCMP when it was spending considerable time near homes. Multiple anecdotal reports of cougars preying on house pets were also reported to the WCC leading up to the removal of this animal. Cougars rely on the element of surprise to catch their prey and are rarely spotted, but with the large number of deer and pets and increasing numbers of rats and raccoons in Princeton, they may be more prevalent. Anecdotally they are seen when spooked, such as during the Hallowe'en Fireworks show.

From January 1<sup>st</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, there were 51 deer reports (Figure 2). Of these reports, 61% were injured/distressed and 6% were aggressive encounters. Encountering deer in Princeton is a frequent occurrence and is uneventful most of the time, however there have been anecdotal reports of deer attacking people while walking from their house to their vehicle, to and from school, or around town trails. This has made many members of the community uneasy with human-habituated deer within town. The deer stay within town to seek shelter and access unsecured food such as crabapple, mountain ash and other fruit trees, birdseed and garbage. Intentional feeding of deer may also be occurring and needs to be discouraged.

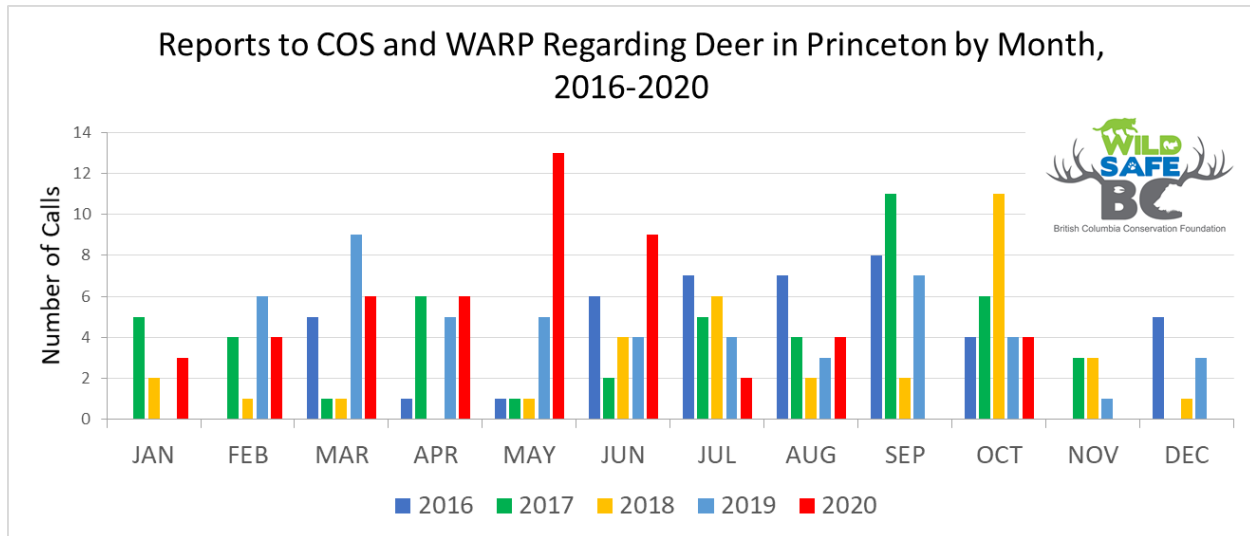


Figure 2. Deer reports to the COS and WARP by month in Princeton, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 to October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

From January 1<sup>st</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, there were 44 black bears reported with 39% as sightings, 42% food conditioned, 9% damage to property, 2% as aggressive, 2% injured/distressed, and 4% confined. Black bear sightings started in early spring again this year which is a newer development for the area. Black bear activity typically peaks in the autumn but bear activity has been noted all spring and summer long for the last two years (Figure 3). Garbage is the most reported attractant, followed by fruit trees (Figure 4). In November, a food-conditioned black bear sow and 3 cubs were destroyed by the COS after repeatedly damaging sheds in order to access garbage.

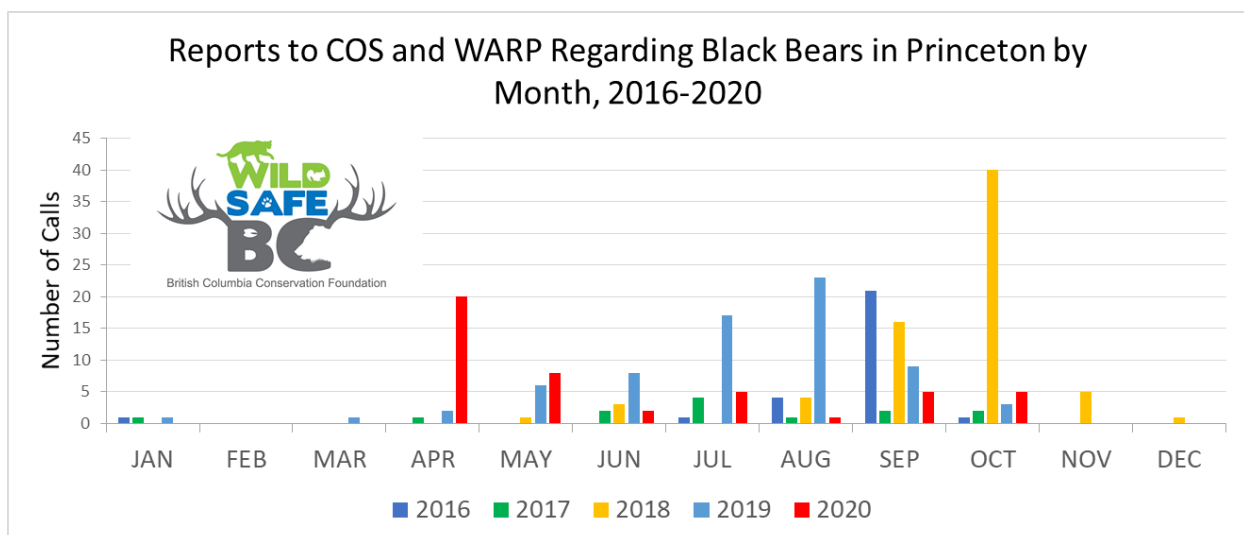


Figure 3. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP by month in Princeton from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 to October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

### Black Bear Reports to the COS and WARP by Attractant, January 1 2016 - October 31 2020

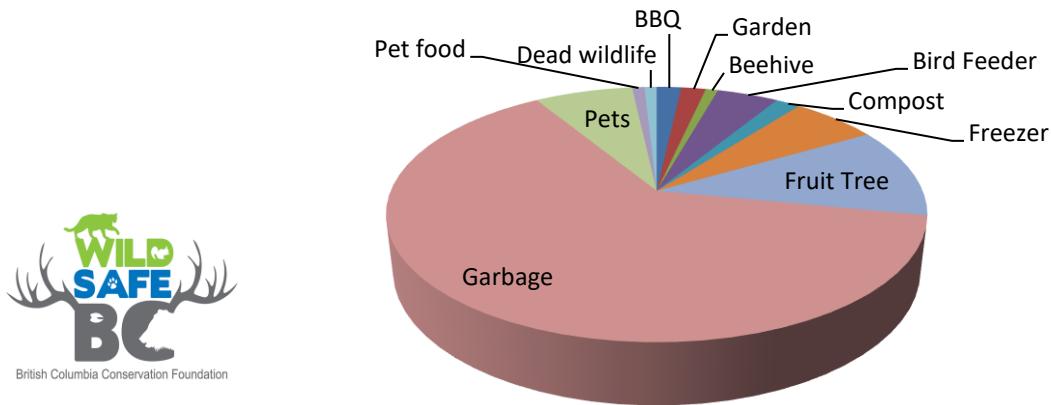


Figure 4. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP by attractant from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 to October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

## 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

Educating youth through the WildSafe Ranger Program shapes the future of our community by building awareness and understanding about human-wildlife conflict. In 2020, the WCC presented to 258 people through:

- Student tours at Princeton Town Hall (two)
- Grade 4-7 classes at Vermilion Forks Elementary (six)
- Grade 1-2 classes at John Allison Elementary (three)

The WildSafe Ranger presentations were held outdoors this year. The WCC discussed wildlife in our area, what animals need to survive, wildlife attractants, types of human-wildlife conflict that occur, and what to do if you encounter a deer, black bear or cougar while walking to and from school (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2020.

## Presentations to Community Groups

WSBC Princeton had presentations scheduled for 2020 however, most presentations to community groups and community events were cancelled in the town of Princeton due to safety concerns around the COVID-19 virus. The WCC did reach 9 people from Emergency Support Services through a presentation on the WildSafeBC Princeton program and attractant management.

## Display Booths

A display booth was set up in front of Princeton's Town Hall every Wednesday in June to host the student Town Hall tours, bring awareness that we now have bears in town during spring, and talk to the public as they pass by or come to town hall to pay their taxes. As a Homeowner's Checklist of attractants was included with the Princeton property taxes, it was a great opportunity to answer any questions people had. The WCC spoke with 132 people at the display booth including the student tours (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Students attending the WSBC Ranger Presentation during Town Hall tours.

## BC Goes Wild

BC Goes Wild is a campaign to celebrate wildlife in BC and it occurs in September which is typically the month when human-bear conflicts are at their highest. The WCC hosted a scavenger hunt that was open to all ages throughout the month of September in collaboration with the Princeton Visitor Centre and was inspired by Supporters of Princeton Parks. The scavenger hunt covered the entire Town of Princeton, and featured wildlife statues, items and attractants. During the event, the WCC posted educational social media articles about wildlife awareness and safety relevant to the scavenger hunt with info about the area and how to reduce human-wildlife conflict. The public had to read all the article information to reach the scavenger hunt clues at the bottom. The local newspaper interviewed the WCC and published an article in the Similkameen Spotlight as well as the Town Newsletter. The WSBC Banner was hung across the Brown Bridge and many posters were put up in multiple businesses and offices across town. A prize table and posters for the scavenger hunt were on display at the Princeton Visitor Centre. Scavenger hunt forms were available at the Princeton Town Hall, Visitor Centre, and website and by emailing the WCC. Prizes were generously donated by Princeton Outdoor Supply, Princeton Visitor Centre and Recreation Department and the WCC. There were 36 scavenger hunt forms picked up from the Town Hall and Visitor Centre and 9 complete forms submitted.



Figure 7. Scavenger hunt 2020 prize winners and display at Princeton Visitor Centre.

## Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Providing door-to-door canvassing and garbage bin tagging to educate residents on how to reduce human-wildlife conflict is an essential part of delivering the WildSafeBC Program. These activities get the WCC out in the community talking with people, helping them come up with solutions on how to stay safe and remove attractants, expands the WCC's knowledge of wildlife

activity in the area and allows the WCC to share this information with residents and wildlife officials. This helps everybody become more aware and knowledgeable and make better decisions.

Much of the door-to-door activity undertaken this year was limited to responding to particular human-wildlife conflict events. The WCC was notified about wildlife conflicts by residents in the community, Town of Princeton Town Hall, WildSafeBC Princeton Facebook page, and WARP. Penryn Avenue, Corina Avenue, and Tunnel neighborhood were prioritized for this activity due to high level of wildlife activity and a total of 211 people were reached. The WCC had 482 personal conversations with community members via email and Facebook messenger to help the public develop solutions to safely coexist with wildlife.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection as a reminder to not put garbage outside unsecured before collection day (Figure 8). During 12 outings between 9 pm and midnight, a total of 94 bins over 3 weeks were tagged in the Town of Princeton. There were 93 fewer bins tagged in 2020 compared to 2019 over the same number of outings. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviors is demonstrated by the 50% reduction in bins placed out this year compare to last year.



**Figure 8. Garbage bins the evening before garbage pick-up in their neighbourhood**

## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Princeton Facebook page doubled its numbers of followers from 91 to 182. This is significant considering most residents prefer to get their posts from the Princeton BC and Area Issues page. Next year, as requested by the public, the WCC will share some WSBC Princeton page posts to this page. The most popular posts this year were about the scavenger hunt.

The WCC was interviewed by Andrea Demeer of the Similkameen Spotlight about the BC Goes Wild Event scavenger hunt. This generated several phone calls and leads for further education opportunities.

## Wildlife in Area Signs

Bright yellow “Deer in Area” and “Bear in Area” signs were placed around the community following reported wildlife activity to encourage awareness of surroundings. Hotspots for aggressive deer this year included the walking trails across from the Deerview neighbourhood, between the first and second bench, and Edgewood Drive. Hotspots for bear activity included the Asp (China) Creek area, bridge and trail between Asp. Street and Lapworth Road and Edgewood Drive.

## WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

The WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program is a new initiative in 2020. Through the program, WSBC is able to provide clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. Campsite managers from Martin’s Lake campground and Pines RV Park met with the WCC to learn these guidelines and will be administering them in their campgrounds and utilizing WSBC informational brochures and posters (Figure 9).



**Figure 9. Bare Camping and Bear in Area signs displayed in Martins Lake Campground**

## Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The Town of Princeton is located in the unceded territory of the Upper Similkameen Indian Band and Nicola Indian Band. The WCC received a request for more information from the Upper Similkameen Indian Band with regards to reducing conflicts with bears and other wildlife in their community. The WCC facilitated a discussion about bringing WSBC education to their community for next year.

## Special Initiatives

- In 2019, the WCC developed a “Homeowner’s Checklist” of wildlife attractants to look for around your home that the Town included in their property tax mail-out. The Town mailed out the checklist again in 2020.
- Per a recommendation from the WCC in 2018, the Town purchased 16 bear-resistant garbage bins for 8 parks and 8 along the Kettle Valley Rail trail.
- The WCC also recommended the addition of a bylaw regarding wildlife attractants in 2018. In April 2020, Wildlife Attractant Bylaw #985 was implemented by the Town and the WCC raised awareness around this new bylaw.

## Challenges and Opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic made it more difficult to reach people at community events and provide outreach to summer students. Despite this, WSBC was able to modify program delivery and still have an effective and safe reach this season. Challenges around human-wildlife conflict in Town of Princeton are related to the intentional and unintentional feeding of wildlife. This includes difficulties with storing garbage securely, tourists and seasonal property users dropping off garbage in town, and improper management of fruit trees.

To address these issues in the community, the following initiatives are recommended for 2021:

- Increased garbage tagging.
- Increased door-to-door education in hotspots.
- Education campaign expanding from the WildSafeBC Princeton Facebook Page to the Town website, Facebook page and other Princeton community Facebook pages.
- Implement steps toward achieving Bear Smart Community status for Princeton.
- Include Princeton businesses and campgrounds in WildSafeBC education.
- Research solutions for garbage disposal for seasonal needs and residences.
- Promote Wildlife Attractant Bylaw #985 and collaborate with COS and bylaw to reduce the feeding of large wildlife.

## Acknowledgements

The WCC is grateful for the generous support of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and the Town of Princeton. Special thanks to the following individuals for the extra time, help and donations to the WildSafeBC Princeton Program: Gary Schatz - Director of Economic Development, Cody Naples - Recreation, Tourism, Cultural & Events Coordinator, Ed Atkinson – Manager of Protective Services, Sharron Basanti - Supporters of Princeton Parks, Lori Thomas – Manager of Princeton Visitor Centre, Tammy Cooper- Hostess at Princeton Visitor Centre, Ron and Loretta Young – Princeton Outdoor Supply. The success of the WildSafeBC Princeton program would not be possible without the inspiration and collaboration from members of Town and the community.