

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2020

Rossland & Trail

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities for the Rossland (Figure 1) and Trail (Figure 2) program between May 1st and November 25th, 2020 including the challenges and successes of delivering the program to residents and visitors in the City of Rossland, the City of Trail and its rural area including Warfield. Black bears are the most frequently reported wildlife both Rossland and Trail and garbage remains the most reported unmanaged attractant. Other wildlife reports include grizzly bears, cougars, coyotes and deer.

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. Through the WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP), the WCC reached 100 students at summer camps in Rossland and Trail. Over 50 hours of garbage tagging was performed, reaching over 30 people. Moreover, over 150 people were reached through various communications with the public, be it in-person visits, emails or telephone calls. Door-to-door canvassing, both in-person and through door hangers, was a focus this season with over 65 hours invested, reaching over 1,100 people. The WildSafeBC Rossland/Trail Facebook page increased its followers by 37 (6% increase).

Some of the ongoing challenges in the 2020 season were exacerbated by the lack of wildlife conflict reports to the COS, which resulted in delays in receiving timely information. Many conflicts can be avoided if acted on in a proactive manner. Further challenges were presented by the vast number of unpicked fruit trees and poorly managed garbage stored out of sight on private land, or in fragile sheds. Goals for the 2021 season include education around bear-resistant bins to community members and municipalities, emphasizing the importance of reporting conflicts early, support and education around fruit gleaning, and promoting the establishment of community-led groups to tackle the issues around unmanaged fruit trees.

The WCC recognizes the support of its sponsors, COS, city staff and organizations. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

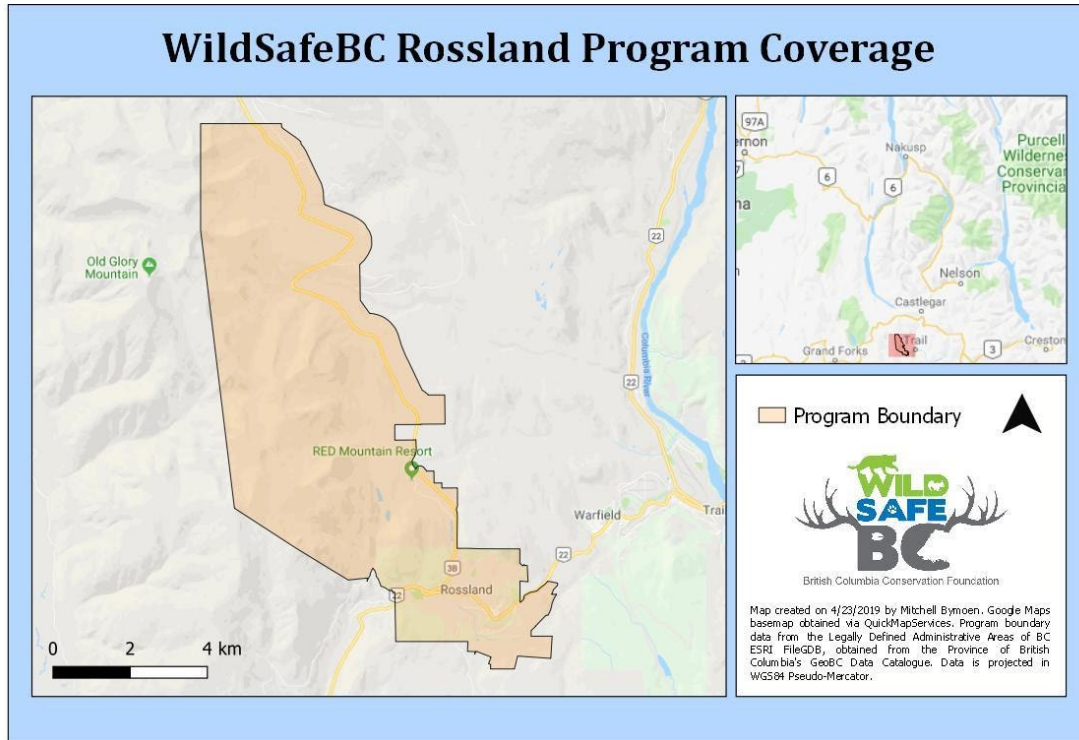


Figure 1. Rossland program coverage area.



Figure 2. Trail program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: WildSafeBC display booth

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). This data is updated daily and this report for Rossland and Trail includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020 (Figure 2).

From January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020, Rossland had a range of wildlife reports with a total of 247 calls made to the COS. Black bears were the most reported species each year and 2017 was a higher conflict year with 61 calls made. Coyotes (14) had the highest reported year in 2019. This year was the only year in which no grizzly bear and deer reports were made (Figure 3).

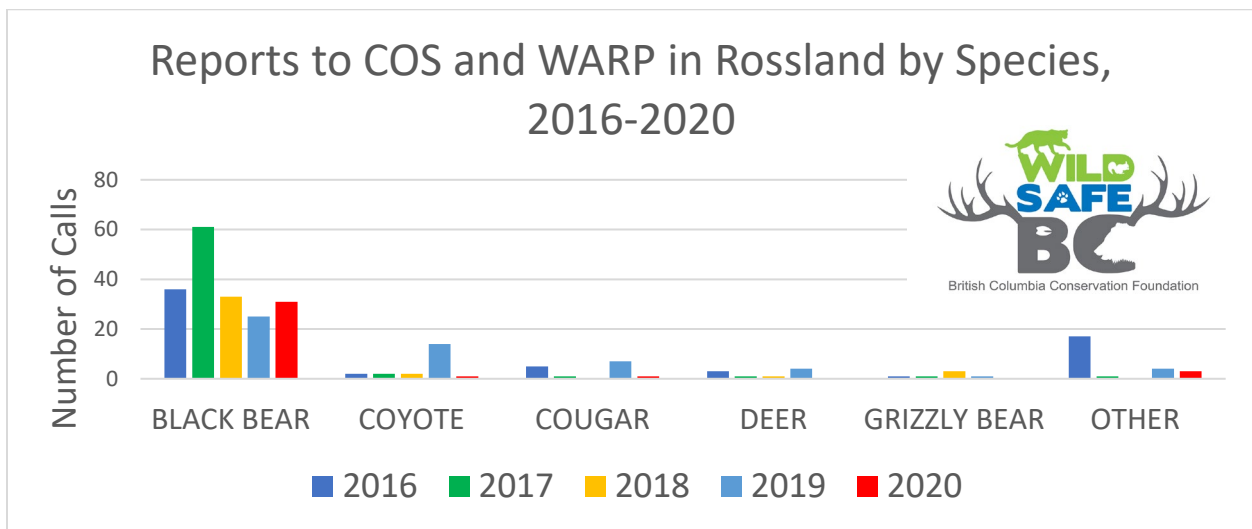


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP by species in Rossland from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

Trail had a range of wildlife reports from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020 with 798 calls made to COS. Black bears were the most reported species each year. In 2016, there was a particularly high number of conflicts with over 220 calls made regarding black bears. Other wildlife reports were coyote, grizzly bear, cougar and deer. In 2020, there were 126 black bear reports made to COS but it was a low conflict year for coyotes and cougars, with one and three being reported respectively (Figure 4).

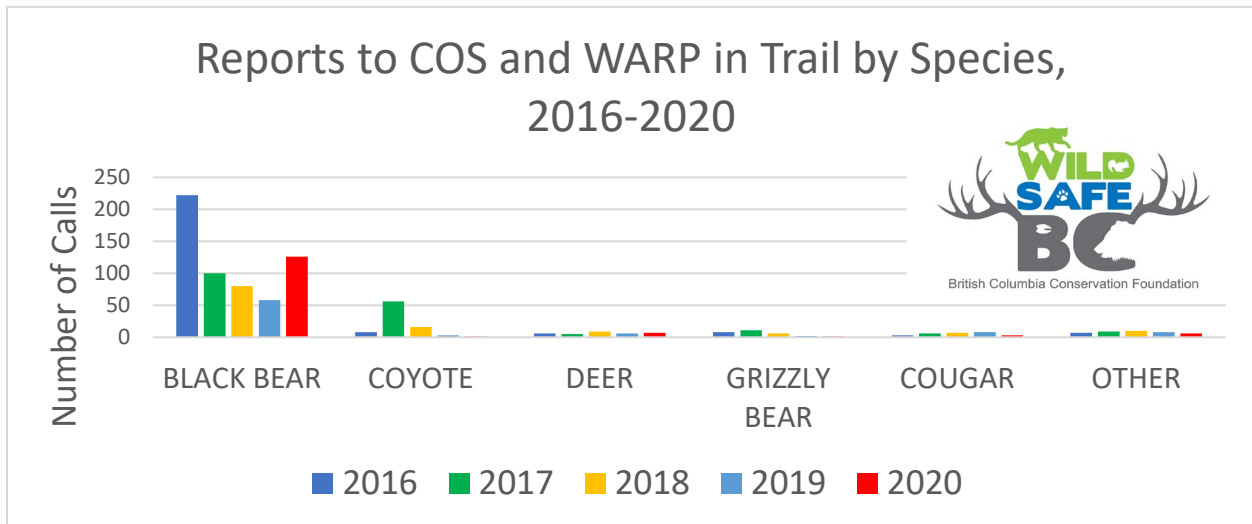


Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP by species in Trail from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

So far this year, there were only 5 reports of garbage as an attractant for black bears in Rossland in 2020, a significantly lower figure than previous years. This is a 78% decrease since 2017, when there were 21 reports around garbage as an attractant. Moreover, there were no reports of livestock or freezers as an attractant for black bears (Figure 5). This could be partly attributed to a reluctance to reporting conflicts to COS.

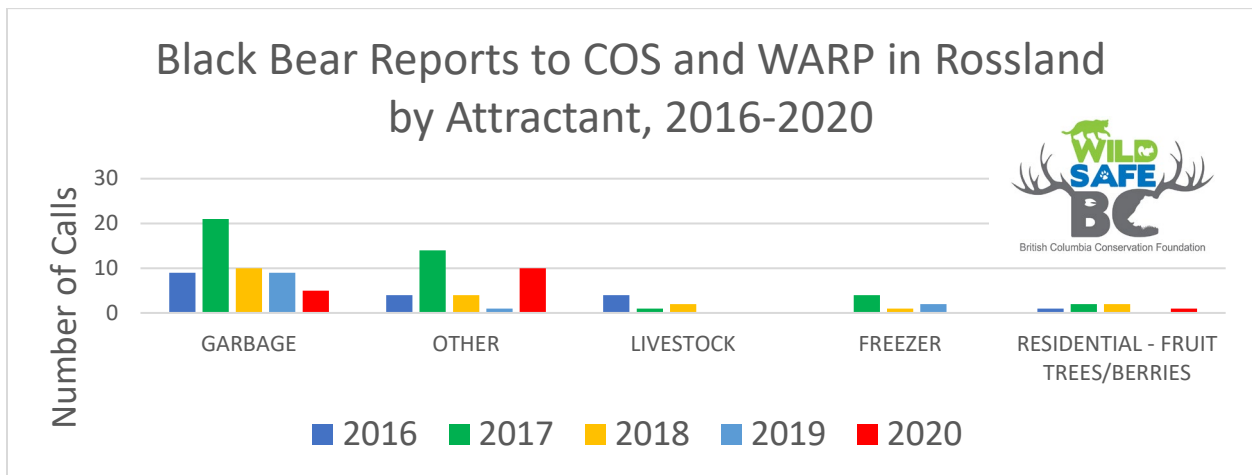


Figure 5. Reports to the COS and WARP in Rossland by attractant from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

In Trail, the most reported attractants were garbage and fruit trees. Other attractants included pets, livestock and bird feeders. The City of Trail bylaw states that no person shall keep horses, cattle, sheep, goats, fowl or poultry on any parcel in the Municipality. This could have been influenced by the low number of livestock attractant conflicts recorded. In 2020, there was an increase in the number of black bear reports associated with garbage (32) compared to 2019 however this was still significantly less than in 2016 when 84 reports were made.

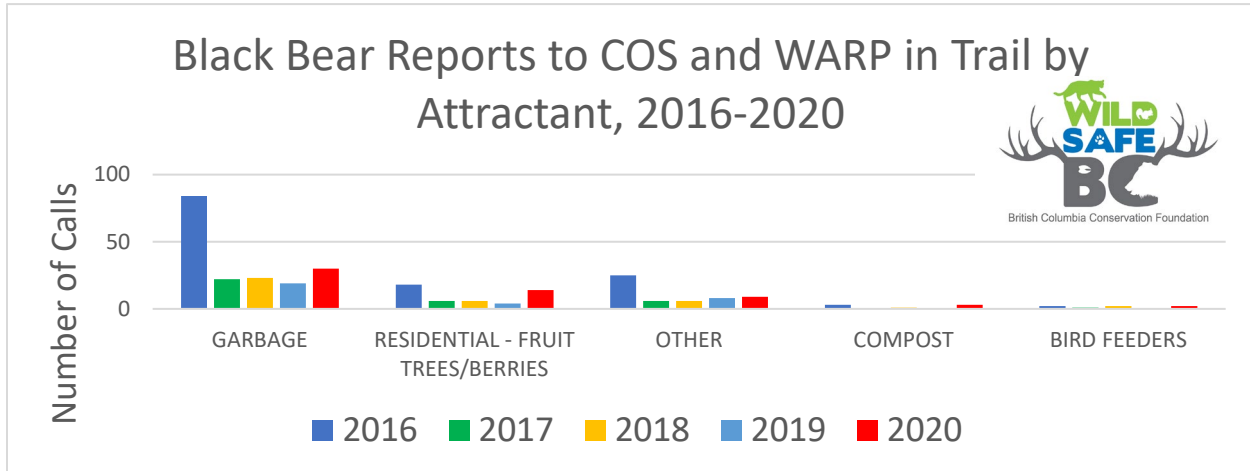


Figure 6. Reports to the COS and WARP in Trail by attractant, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

Black bear sightings are highly seasonal and correlate with typical behavior. Black bear-related reports in Rossland fluctuated by month. In 2017, black bear reports (60) peaked in June (34). There was also an increase in reports in September and October when bears enter hyperphagia; a period of increased caloric demand in preparation for winter denning. In 2020, July had 7 black bear reports, up from 3 the year before. This can be attributed to a sow with cubs remaining in the Redstone Golf Course area of Rossland. These black bears became habituated to human behaviour and were the source of several calls (Figure 7).

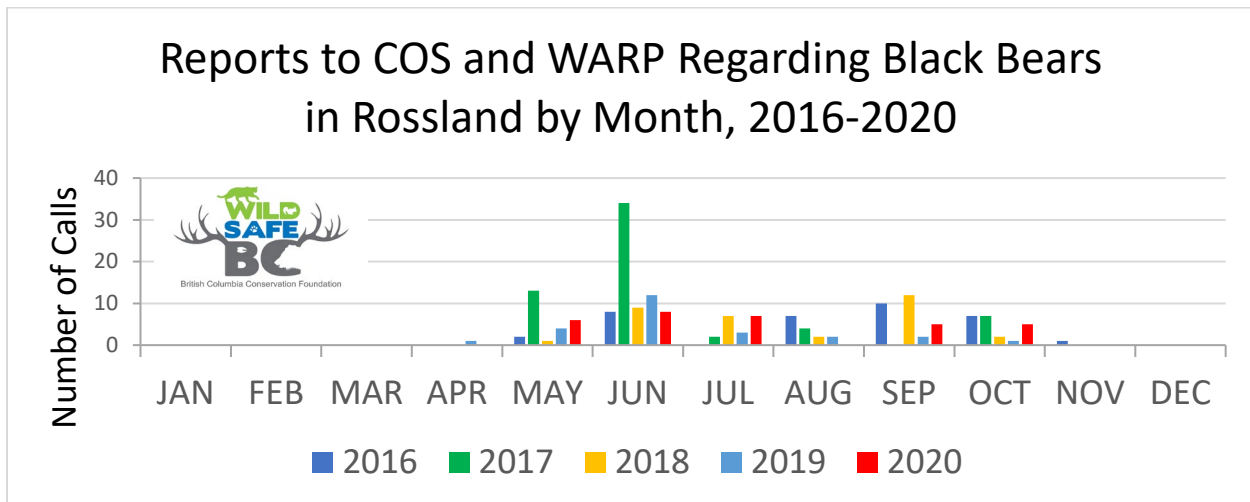


Figure 7. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears in Rossland from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

In Trail, April and May had the higher number of reports and July and August had a significant drop in reports. These patterns could be correlated with the amount of natural food sources available. In addition, there was a spike of reports in September and October. In 2020, there was an increase in black bear reports in June (34) (Figure 8).

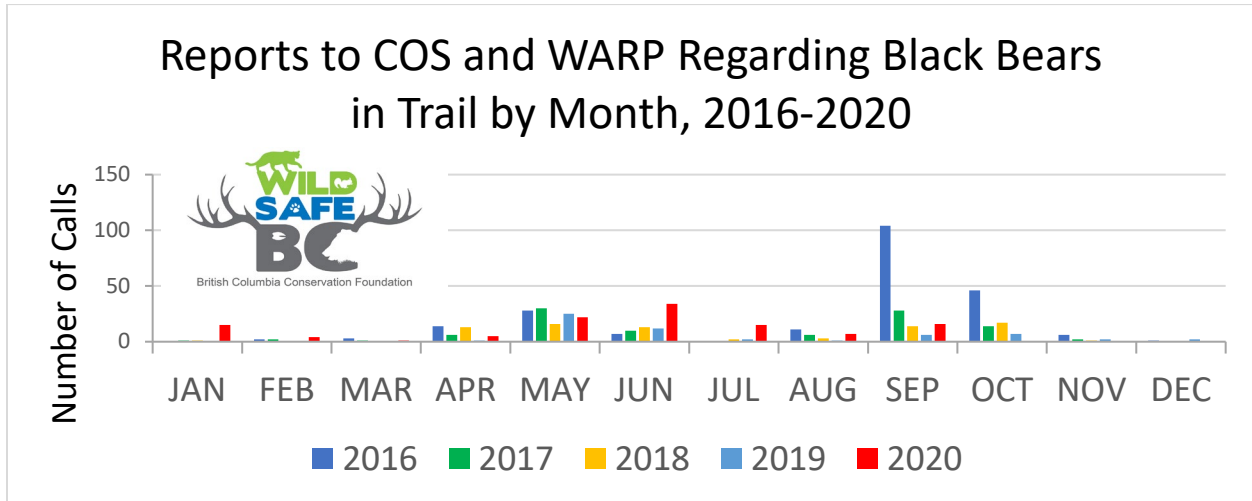


Figure 8. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears in Trail from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

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 introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of three youth organizations participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program through outdoor presentations that allowed for physical distancing. Despite group sizes being limited to 10 students due to health restrictions and guidelines, over 100 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits (Table 1).

Table 1. Youth organizations that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2020.

| Youth organization | Ages | Students |
|---------------------|------|----------|
| Rossland Museum | 4-11 | 52 |
| Rossland City Camps | 4-13 | 30 |
| Trail Kids Camp | 5-12 | 20 |

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave a total of 2 presentations through webinars and outdoor presentations to 14 participants including City of Rossland Summer Camp counselors and new ESL residents (as arranged by the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL) (Table 2).

Table 2. Organizations that received presentations in 2020.

| Organization | # of participants | Type of presentation |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| City of Rossland | 6 | Bear spray workshop |
| CBAL | 8 | Wildlife awareness and safety |

Display Booths

In previous years, display booths at local events were a great success with local residents and tourists in attendance. Residents were able to access information on solutions for their unique attractant challenges. This year, many of those events were cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. The WCC was able to organise one display booth for residents of Trail at Canadian Tire and one for residents of Genelle near the general store (Figure 9). These events reached 117 and 22 people respectively.



Figure 9. Display booth at Canadian Tire in Trail (photo by Castlegar Community Coordinator).

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 in BC. Throughout the second week of September, the WCC hosted a mountain bike ride around Rossland's local "green" rated trails. The turnout for the event totaled four participants and one volunteer who tailed the group. This turnout was to be expected as that week, there were new COVID-19 cases reported in the area. The event in Rossland was a success, despite the small turnout. The participants were engaged and enjoyed the event, and everyone acted responsibly with regard to safety, which made the event run very smoothly and helped to project a positive atmosphere.

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 doors as had been done in the past as a result of COVID-19 safety precautions. Specific areas for education were prioritized by areas identified by the COS or by reports of heightened wildlife activity or attractant management issues. Over 1,100 people were contacted in the following neighbourhoods:

- Red Mountain
- Upper East Rossland
- Lower East Rossland
- Lower West Rossland
- Happy Valley
- West Trail
- East Trail
- Waneta
- Glenmerry
- Warfield

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. During 19 outings, a total of 30 bins were tagged in the City of Trail and 3 in the City of Rossland. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours is demonstrated by the 80% 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 10).

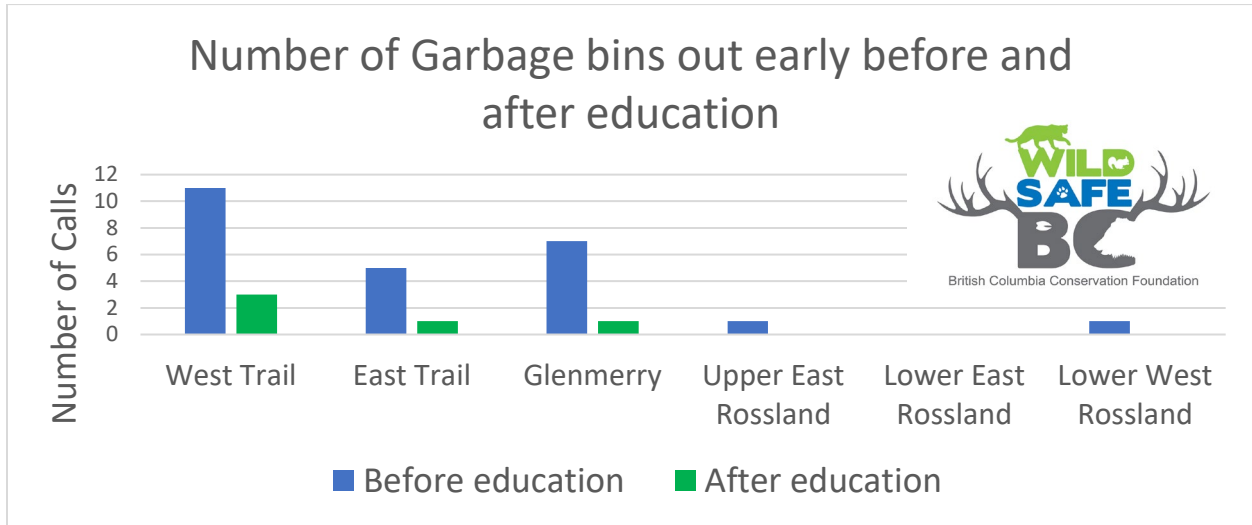


Figure 10. Number of bins placed out early for collection before education activities and repeat offenders after education in Rossland and Trail.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Rossland/Trail Facebook page grew 6% in 2020 from 638 to 675 page followers. The WCC submitted two news article to the Trail Times about the managing attractants that were well received (<https://www.trailtimes.ca/news/bears-are-back-so-is-rossland-trail-wildsafebc/>, <https://www.trailtimes.ca/news/bears-getting-hungrier-warns-rossland-trail-wildsafebc/>).

Wildlife in Area Signs

The WCC worked closely with the COS to prioritize specific areas for “Bear in Area” signs. The selected area were high traffic zones and were often around schools, playgrounds and parks. Alongside the COS, areas were suggested by the City of Trail and Warfield Village Hall.

Collaborations

The WCC collaborated with the COS, who was invaluable in sharing information on areas of conflict and regularly offered advice on targeting individual communities and their specific problems. Furthermore, the WCC collaborated with Grizzly Bear Solutions to provide the public with concise information about electric fencing.

Special Initiatives

The WCC presented to the City of Rossland outlining the steps and benefits of the Bear Smart program. The presentation was well-received and the City expressed interest in pursuing the program. The Province and WildSafeBC are there to provide further information as needed.

Challenges and Opportunities

There is an abundance of residential fruit trees in both Rossland and Trail and this continues to be a key factor leading to human-bear conflicts. In 2020, several bears were reported to be damaging property and remaining in neighborhoods due to this unmanaged attractant. Although the majority of these calls were made from Trail residents, this is still a concern in Rossland. As mentioned previously, these calls are less frequent in Rossland as there is a reluctance to call the COS. This reluctance has affected the ability for WildSafeBC to gain valuable information about areas of conflict in the community. As a result, residents are waiting until conflicts are too much for them to handle and until bears have become food conditioned and/or human-habituated. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community and would benefit to increased education and fruit gleaning activities. However, some of the fruit gleaning organizations have disbanded and so less fruit gleaning is being conducted compared to previous years.

Moreover, garbage continues to be a problem in Rossland and Trail, especially for houses with carports or garden sheds that are easily accessible by wildlife. Several calls were received this year regarding poorly stored and managed garbage bins and also damage to property where bins were stored insecurely.

To address the challenges above, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2021:

- Electric fence demonstration(s)
- Education campaigns focusing on the hazards caused by attractants and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops
- Engage food banks and other non-profits in addressing the abundance of fruit
- Connect residents through social media fruit gleaning groups or food-share
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots
- Encouraging the public to call when conflict first arises so that issues can be handled with education
- Promote the use of bear-resistant bins and work with local municipalities on making them more easily available
- Support Rossland's interest in becoming a Bear Smart Community

There are a couple of initiatives that stand out as opportunities for next year. The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses 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.

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. More information on both of these programs is available on the WildSafeBC website.

Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank the cities of Rossland and Trail, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Strategy, and the Columbia Basin Trust for their financial support of this program. Thank you to the COS (Ben Beetlestone, Blair Thin and Matthew Corbett) for their open communication, guidance and assistance with specific wildlife conflicts. A special thank you to the media outlets for their stories and broadcasts that helped spread the messaging of WildSafeBC. The WCC would like to thank the community members of Rossland and Trail for their support and readiness to learn about the wildlife and attractant management strategies.