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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildsafeBC (WSBC) Selkirk-Purcells Program between May 1st and November 30th 2020. The WSBC Selkirk-Purcells Program covers the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) management zones A, B, C and G including the towns of Creston, Erickson, Yahk, Salmo, Ymir, Crawford Bay, Yaqa Nukiy and surrounding areas (Figure 1). Within the Selkirk-Purcells region, the program provides education and promotes best practices to reduce human-wildlife conflict by working closely with the Conservation Officer Service (COS), local municipalities, community groups, area schools, small businesses and other independent organizations. We acknowledge that the land on which we conduct our activities is the traditional and unceded territory of the Ktunaxa People. We are grateful for the opportunity to work in this territory.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities in the Selkirk-Purcells region in 2020 with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community. While it was an active year, 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.

It was a moderate year for human-wildlife conflict in the area this year. In the spring, there was considerable activity from black bears and other wildlife. This kept the WCC busy providing attractant management education in areas where conflict was highest. A relatively quiet summer was followed by an increasingly busy late fall in West Creston, Erickson, Crawford Bay and Salmo with reports of grizzly bear, black bear and cougar sharply increasing in September and October. The WCC responded with door-to-door education, display booths and by hosting community educational events in hot spot areas.

WSBC had a strong community presence despite COVID-19 this season with over 1,300 contacts with residents. Wildlife awareness, attractant management, electric fencing and safety was a primary focus of our BC Goes Wild events this year with talks and booths providing over 600 residents with information on local wildlife and how to stay safe while exploring and living in wildlife areas. There were 154 students that became WildSafe Rangers and 160 residents took part in educational workshops. Approximately 450 contacts were made at display booths and over 400 residents were reached via door-to-door. Through WSBC's bin tagging program, there was an 80% reduction in the number of bins put out the night before collection in Creston.

Social media was a powerful tool to gather knowledge of local human-wildlife conflict events and to reach out directly to community members. The WSBC Selkirk-Purcell Facebook page increased its followers by 24% this season. Print articles for the Creston Valley Advance and on-air and online media outreach with local radio station Juice FM expanded the program exposure. This season WSBC continued to expand its bear and wildlife messaging in Creston and Erickson to include managing rat attractants and harbourages.

Another focus this year was residential fruit trees and orchards in the Creston Valley, Salmo and Crawford Bay. Bear access to fruit trees is often seen as innocuous in the region. To address this perception, the WCC provided information to over 100 fruit tree owners on the wildlife hazards associated fruit trees particularly in Erickson, Wynndel, West Creston, Crawford Bay and Salmo. The WCC offered individuals guidance on managing this attractant, including providing referrals to a cost-sharing electric fencing program and professional consultation.

WSBC collaborated with several organizations this season to bring in expertise and expand the reach of our messaging. Since the Selkirk-Purcell program reach is geographically large the WCC collaborated with other WSBC coordinators in order to provide timely coverage. WSBC hosted Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions for events and worked with her to increase access of residents to bear-resistant garbage bins and electric fencing. Collaborating with the Village of Salmo, the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (CVWMA), the Creston Valley Trails Society, the Salmo Valley Trails Society, the Ymir Community Association and the Crawford Bay Community Association provided opportunities for educational programming to youth and adults alike in the form of education booths and on demand safety training including bear spray demos.

While COVID-19 restriction were a challenge this year, programming was altered to allow for safety protocols to be implemented and social distancing to be adhered to. Another key challenge this year was meeting the demand of such a large and diverse area. Attitudes, awareness and conflict issues vary widely over the region. Continued outreach and increased community presence is needed to both gather knowledge and provide better service to the differing regions. In addition, increased Indigenous awareness and outreach will be a key goal next year as well as introducing WildSafeBC Bare Campsite initiatives to local campgrounds and collaborating actively with businesses on our WildSafe Business Pledge Program. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

WildSafeBC is grateful for the funding support provided by the Town of Creston, the RDCK, the Columbia Basin Trust, the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and the BC Conservation Foundation.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Selkirk-Purcells program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: Information booths at trailheads and public events provided community outreach.

Highlights from the 2020 Season

Wildlife Activity

WSBC utilizes data collected from the Conservation Officer Service (COS) to track wildlife activity in the area. Reports made to the 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). This data is updated daily and this report for Selkirk-Purcells includes data from January 1, 2016 to Oct 31, 2020 (Figure 1-3). There was considerable black bear activity in the spring with a sharp decline in activity in the summer and a small resurgence later in the fall, likely due to declining food sources at higher altitudes with the seasonal change (Figure 2). The most reported species were black bear, deer, grizzly bear and cougar (Figure 3). Most deer reports were related to animal injury. Black bear reports remained steady from last year however, there was an increase in grizzly-related reports. Grizzly bear conflict is centered in West Creston, Wynndel, the Creston flats with anecdotal activity in Crawford Bay. They are a species of high concern for residents. Cougar conflict was low this year until the late fall, specifically in West Creston. In November, there were many sightings in town and pets assumed taken by a lone cougar coming into town. Door-to-door education and Facebook outreach was done to educate residents about the presence of the cougar in the area, cougar safety and attractant management.

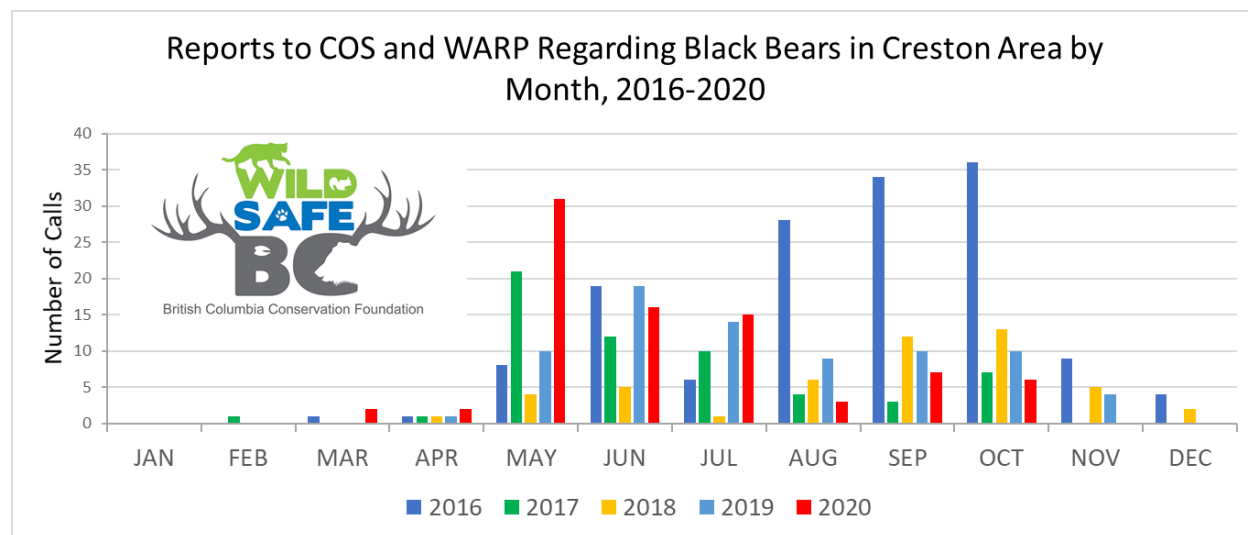


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to Oct 31, 2020

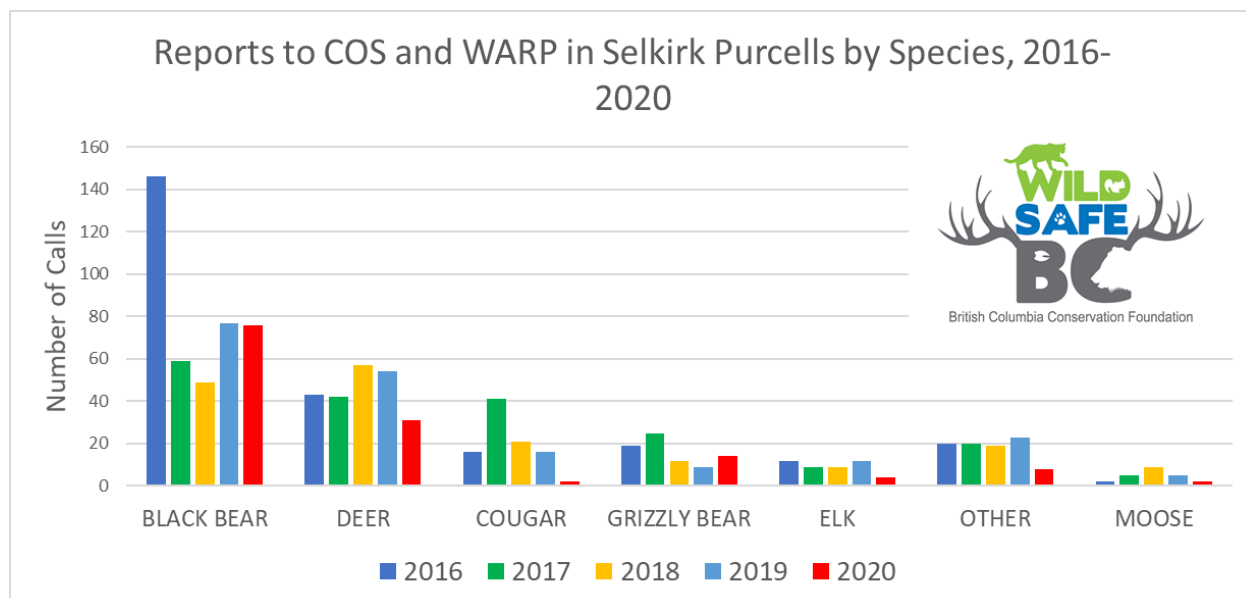


Figure 3. Species reported to the COS and WARP in the Selkirk-Purcells from January 1, 2016 to Oct 31, 2020.

The most reported attractant was garbage, but livestock and fruit trees were also significant attractants (Figure 4). Garbage had been decreasing as an attractant in 2017 and 2018 but has been on the increase in 2019 and 2020. The WCC has noted during garbage tagging and door-to-door campaigns that there has been an increase in residents leaving garbage out unsecured particularly in the Town of Creston proper. Wildlife conflicts associated with fruit trees continue to be a less reported however, they are a significant attractant which many residents do not view as a problem. Livestock-related conflict has been on the increase over the last 4 years which highlights the need for electric fencing in the area.

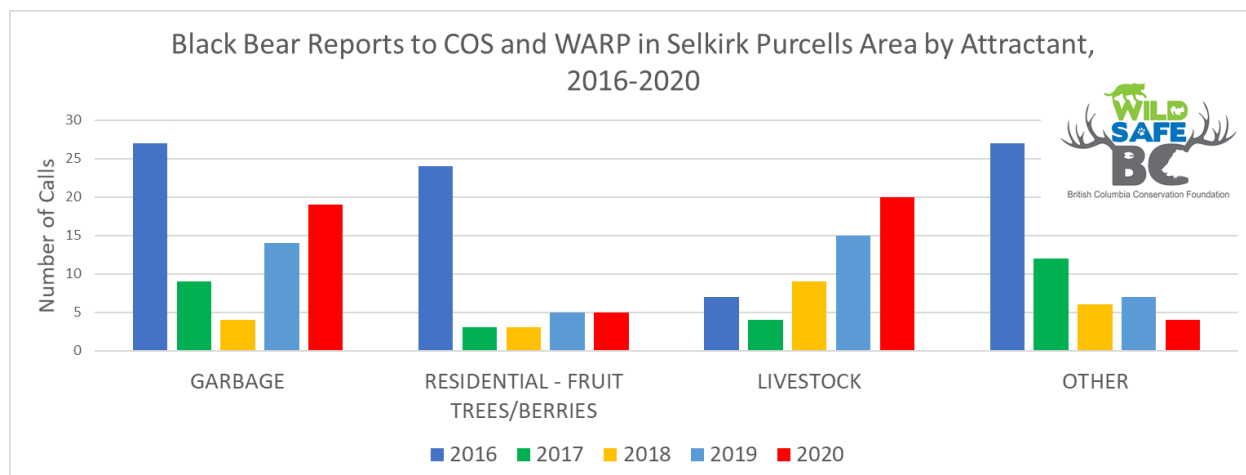


Figure 4. Year-over-year reports for wildlife attractant mediated conflict from January 1, 2016 to Oct 31, 2020 in the Selkirk-Purcells communities.

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. It was more limited this year as schools adjusted to COVID-19 protocols and fewer schools participated. Still, Salmo Elementary and Erickson Elementary participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program through presentations that allowed for physical distancing. Over 150 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits (Table 1).

Table 1. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2020.

School	Grade	Students	Extended
Salmo Elementary	K-1	54	
Erickson Elementary	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	104	

Presentations to Community Groups

Safety training for residents was a focus this year particularly as part of our BC Goes Wild, an annual WSBC campaign to celebrate wildlife in BC. Events take place in September, typically the month when human-bear conflicts are at their highest in BC. The WCC gave a total of 6 outdoor presentations to over 160 participants (Table 2). Presentations were in Ymir, Salmo, Creston, West Creston, Crawford Bay and involved collaborations with the COS, Gillian Saunders of Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions, local trails societies in Creston and Salmo, and the Crawford Bay and Ymir Community Associations. Presentations this year focused on safety with attractant management principles. Bear spray demonstrations and display booths were also part of these events with over 80 people receiving bear spray training this year (Figure 5).

Table 2. Community Wildlife Presentations 2020.

Type	Organization	Date	Attendees
Creston Grizzly Bear Safety Talk with bear spray training x2	Town of Creston, Grizzly Bear Solutions, COS	Sept 17 2020	79
West Creston Grizzly Bear Safety Talk with bear spray training	Grizzly Bear Solutions, COS	2020-10-08	15
Ymir Safety Workshop with bear spray training	Ymir Community Association, The Goods	2020-09-01	15
Salmo Safety Workshop with bearspray training x2	Salmo Valley Trails Society, Town of Salmo	2020-09-01	31
Crawford Bay Safety with Bear Spray Training	Crawford Bay Community Association	2020-10-03	10
Creston Valley Trails Society Safety with Bear Spray Training	Creston Valley Trails Association	2020-10-03	15



Figure 5: Social Distancing was adhered to during bear safety presentations

Display Booths

Display booths were an important component of our initiatives this year as they allowed community visibility, on demand access to information for community members and ease of social distancing (Figure 6). Often these booths were done in conjunction with the organized safety talks mentioned above and focused on both safety and attractant management.

Display booths with on demand safety and bear spray training were a key part of our BC Goes Wild campaign this year. Throughout September, the WCC hosted safety information booths in Crawford Bay, Creston, Wynndel, Salmo, Ymir and West Creston reaching over 250 people. Booth locations focused on trailheads managed by the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, Salmo Valley Trails Society and the Creston Valley Trails Society in order to reach outdoor recreationalists with safety and bear spray training. These booths were often done in conjunction with trailhead openings and other events such as the Salmo mini Gran Fondo in order to maximize opportunities to connect with the public. Outdoor recreationalists and residents were also a strong focus of booths set up at the Wynndel gas station and wilderness supply store. This started many great conversations and reached people in a community that can be difficult to convey information easily.



Figure 6. WildSafeBC display booths were set up at community spaces

Display booths were also set up at Farmers' Markets in Salmo and Creston reaching over 200 residents. These events are great for continued visibility in the community during COVID-19 and are particularly great for reaching out to families with children.

In conjunction with the RDCK, info booths were set up at the Creston Landfill greenwaste facility. This facility is located outside of the electric fence that protects much of the landfill. Residents have been dumping foodwaste in the greenwaste piles and attracting wildlife to the facility. WildSafeBC set up display booths on two occasions with a goal to educate residents on how to manage attractants at home and at the landfill.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door campaigns are important outreach activities for WSBC programs. It is the action often requested by the COS, to assist them with issues that are causing human-bear conflicts. During COVID-19 Phase 2, door-to-door was restricted to leaving door hangers and brochures on doorsteps. After COVID-19 Phase 3 was rolled out, the WCC knocked on doors as in previous years. Over 400 households were reached.

Door-to-door in Creston provided residents with attractant management information on rats, bears and other human-wildlife conflict concurrently. Door-to-door in Creston focused on residences that left garbage, fruit on trees or other attractants unsecured or who were identified through garbage tagging. In West Creston and Wynndel, door-to-door education focused on human-grizzly conflict, while in Salmo and Crawford Bay door-to-door focused on conflict hotspots identified by the COS, social media and word of mouth.

Bin tagging is an educational activity performed by WSBC consisting of placing highly visible, removable stickers containing educational messaging on garbage containers placed out the night before pickup (Figure 7). Containers placed out too early can attract wildlife and rats to neighbourhoods. Garbage collection in the region only occurs in Salmo and Creston. In some areas bin tagging is used in conjunction with attractant bylaws. Neither Salmo nor Creston have a bylaw directing residents to only place garbage out the morning of collection. Bin tagging was always followed up with door-to-door education. During six outings in Creston, bin tagging occurred both pre- and post-education. There was an 80% reduction in repeat bins left out on the second bin tagging event done post-education (Figure 8). This indicates the program is highly effective at changing human behaviours and promoting best practices.



Figure 7: Garbage bins were tagged as part of an education initiative to reduce garbage accessible to wildlife

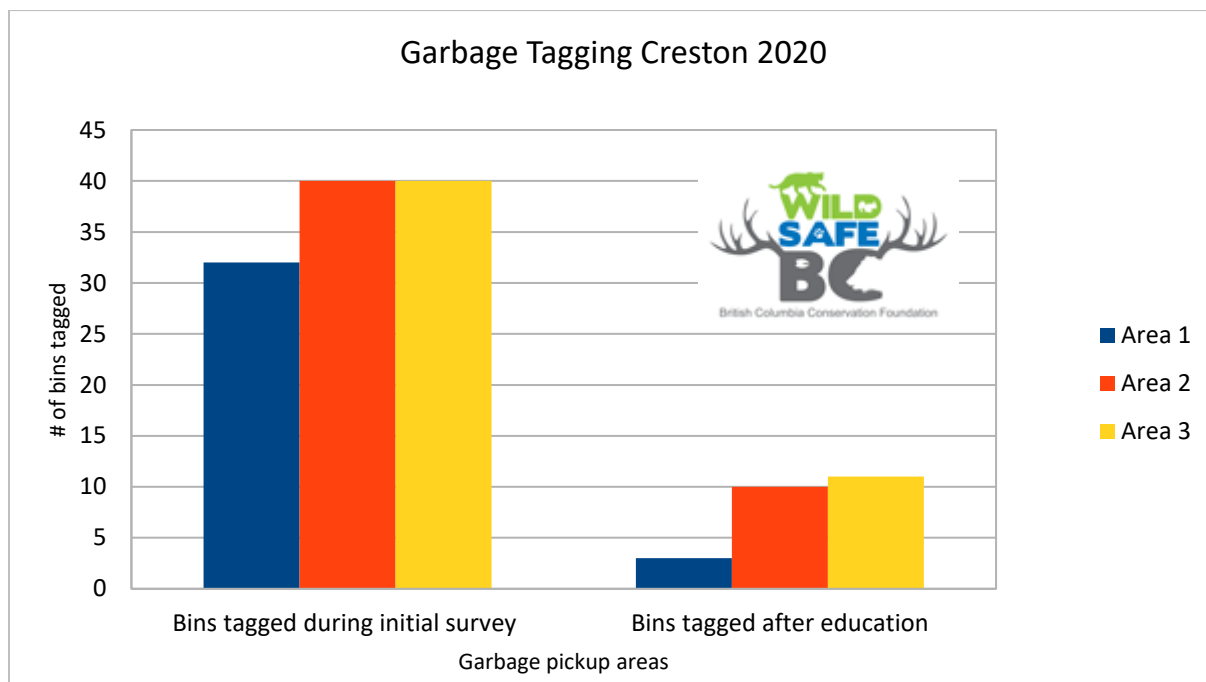


Figure 8. Number of carts placed out early for collection before education activities and repeat offenders after education in Creston BC.

Social Media and Press

The WCC was active on social media sites engaging residents through the WSBC Selkirk-Purcells Facebook page and through community pages for Salmo, Creston, Crawford Bay and the Kootenays in general. In 2020, the Facebook page gained 73 followers for a total of 372; an increase of 24%. Social media engagement was increased through cross-posting to online forums and community pages. The most effective posts were in response to posts on community pages detailing human-wildlife conflict events and forums such as Farm the Kootenays, Creston BC Conversations, Salmo Chit Chat, Bulletin Board and Voice pages, East Shore Happenings, West Creston Happenings and Ymir Town.

The Creston Valley Advance newspaper's editor and WSBC worked together to provide information regarding wildlife safety and attractant management to the community. The WCC submitted articles to and was interviewed by The Creston Valley Advance resulting in 4 articles over the 2020 season. Topics included an introduction to the 2020 WSBC program, fruit tree management, fall bear activity and BC Goes Wild events.

Radio station 94.1 Juice FM continued to be supportive, providing ample air-time and interviewing the WCC regularly to discuss issues such as human-wildlife conflict, local garbage tagging activities, rat attractant management, fruit trees and hyperphagia and habituation and food conditioning in bears and to promote grizzly and black bear safety workshops in the area. They also published several online articles in support of the on-air content on their MyCrestonNow site.

Brochure and Signage Distribution

WSBC brochures provide biological and behavioural information about wildlife species, as well as safety information and best practices on how to avoid conflict. Brochures are distributed as part of the door-to-door campaigns and are distributed to service centers, visitor centers and stores. Brochures were also distributed to the Town of Creston Municipal Hall, Salmo Village office, Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, Crawford Bay Visitor Center, Creston Visitor Center, the Ymir General Store, the Salmo Outdoor Store, Salmo Valley Trails Society, Creston Valley Trails Society, Lockhart Provincial Park, Wynndel Outdoor Store, the Riondel General Store and all campgrounds and parks in the area.



Figure 9: Example of educational signage used in Salmo.

The WCC distributed posters and signage in the area. Local hiking groups and campgrounds in the area were provided with posters outlining best practices around attractant management in the wild. The Village of Salmo used WSBC wildlife in area signs to alert residents of active cougars and bears in residential areas (Figure 9).

Special Initiatives

The Village of Salmo continues to work towards Bear Smart Community status and WSBC continued to support them by providing education in the area and providing educational signage. The Village in turn supported WSBC with promotion of events and supplying printing of educational materials.

Challenges and Opportunities

Garbage is the most reported attractant in the Town of Creston for both rats and other wildlife. To improve garbage management, the following opportunities have been identified:

- Continued promotion or expansion of the bear-resistant bin cost-sharing and loaner program particularly for areas of economic depression.
- Securing funding for bear-resistant bins suitable for use in residential care home and independent living facilities.
- Graduated introduction of bear-resistant bins into municipal and commercial spaces.
- The introduction of an attractant bylaw that would provide increase community awareness, decreased social license around not managing attractants and provide a system to manage individuals not receptive to educational messaging.

- Rat populations were the number one species of concern voiced by residents of Creston and Erickson to WSBC this year. Increased focused education and securing of attractants should continue to be expanded next year with a focus on garbage.

Fruit trees and livestock continue to be a source of attractants in both residential and rural parts of the area. Continued activities should include:

- Electric fence demonstrations in Crawford Bay, Salmo, Creston, Erickson and Wynndel.
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information
- Increased referrals and cooperation with fruit-gleaning organizations.
- Engage food banks and other non-profits.
- Connect residents through Social Media food sharing group.
- Continued door-to-door campaigns in hotspots.
- Focused outreach in Salmo, Ymir, West Creston, Canyon-Lister and Crawford Bay.

Grizzly activity continues to be an issue in West Creston, the Creston Valley flats, Wynndel and Yaqan NiKuy with many reports of conflict and bears coming right up to the western border of Creston. Corn, livestock, livestock carcasses and fruit trees are all human-sourced foods that local grizzly populations are accessing, making coexistence difficult as these bears come in increased conflict with human neighbours. Electric fencing is key to managing these attractants. Creating local buy in of electric fencing, while also supporting farmers and residents to implement electric fencing and other attractant management techniques, is an ongoing challenge. Long-term, innovative and collaborative solutions, involving residents, farmers, biologists, government, the COS and NGOs such as WSBC, will be needed in order to alleviate a serious and ongoing human-wildlife conflict.

Safety continues to be a concern of recreational users over the entire area, particularly with respect to grizzly bears. Bear-spray use, although increasing in acceptance, continues to be looked at with by suspicion by many residents. Bear spray education and training should be continued in 2021 with efforts made to work with commercial businesses and local outdoor recreational groups to promote bear spray usage. The WildSafe Business Pledge can be a helpful tool for promoting best practices. Attractant management should continue to be taught concurrent with safety training.

To manage human-wildlife conflict over such a large and heterogeneous area, collaboration and cooperation are key. Our diversity can be our strength. Efforts to increase connectivity between different individuals, organizations and government agencies should be encouraged, specifically:

- Continued participation and encouragement of partners to take part in the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group.
- Encouraging increased cooperation and communication with respect to rat population management in the Creston Valley with regards to different levels of government, commercial entities, community groups and residents.
- Continued working with local media to spread information widely and effectively, in particular reaching out to the East Shore News next year and increasing collaboration with Creston Juice FM to possibly include regular wildlife updates.
- Working with local businesses through the WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program.
- Work with local campgrounds to promote the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program to promote safety and attractant management at local campgrounds.
- Continue ongoing education outreach by WSBC.

The WCC is committed to supporting the Town of Creston and the Village of Salmo, the Regional Districts, local businesses, schools, and non-profit groups in reducing human-wildlife conflicts.

Acknowledgements

The WSBC Selkirk-Purcells program would like to acknowledge the generous support it receives from its sponsors, the Columbia Basin Trust, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation and the Town of Creston. The WSBC Selkirk-Purcells program also values the important support provided by Conservation Officers in helping direct the coordinators to problem neighborhoods so that their time and energy can be focused. Many thanks again to media outlets such as 94.1 Juice FM, and the Creston Valley Advance for allowing our voice to be magnified throughout the Selkirk-Purcells area. A special thanks to Gillian Sanders from Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions for her collaborative efforts on a variety of presentations. WildSafeBC would also like to thank the school staff of School District 8 and the parents of the students for their commitment to the WSBC education program. We are grateful to the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, Salmo Valley Trail Society and the Creston Valley Trail Society for hosting booths and safety talks. WSBC Selkirk-Purcell would also like to thank David White, the WSBC Nelson Community Coordinator, and Pat Wray, the WSBC Castlegar Coordinator for offering timely coverage to our large and diverse area.