

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2020

## Squamish-Lillooet Regional District

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## Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (SLRD) Program between May 1<sup>st</sup> and November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. This program is new to the SLRD and complements the work being doing in the Bear Smart Communities of the District of Squamish and the Resort Municipality of Whistler.

The SLRD consists of four member municipalities (District of Lillooet, Village of Pemberton, Resort Municipality of Whistler, District of Squamish) and four unincorporated rural Electoral Areas (A, B, C, D) (Figure 1 and Figure 2). While Squamish and Whistler have their own education programs, there was a recognized need for a human-wildlife conflict reduction education in the rural areas and smaller communities. The WildSafeBC SLRD Program focused on the communities of Britannia Beach, Furry Creek, Squamish Valley, Pemberton Meadows, and Lillooet. The SLRD is located within the traditional territories of the Lil'wat, Squamish, St'at'imc, Stó:lō, Tsleil-Waututh, Nlaka'pamux, Tsilhqot'in, and Secwepemc Nations. Pemberton serves as the approximate geographic center of the region and hosts the SLRD office.

This season was unusual in that there were several reports of grizzly bears in both Squamish and Whistler. In addition, near Lillooet there were three separate incidents where people were attacked by either a black bear, grizzly bear, or a cougar. Black bears remain the most commonly reported species for the area followed by cougars and coyote.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed education outreach with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in SLRD communities. 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. Despite the challenges of COVID19, the program was still successful and accomplished the following activities:

- 2 presentations given to community groups reaching 23 participants
- 9 WRP presentations and over 120 youth reached
- 458 people reached through door hangers and garbage bin tagging
- 10 display booths reaching 264 people
- 88 new Facebook page followers (an increase of 9%)
- 7 recreation sites visited and 170 people reached

The program identified several opportunities for 2021 including:

- Continual expansion of the program through the SLRD with a focus on communities within the Bridge River Valley and Lillooet areas.
- Continued support of the COS team with regards to education and outreach and encouraging the public to report to the RAPP line, especially in areas where conflicts and dangerous wildlife are under-reported.
- Increased collaboration and support with First Nations communities.
- Increased awareness of electric fencing through workshops.
- Focus on reducing access by bears to garbage and fruit trees.
- Increased grizzly bear awareness as interactions are expected to increase.
- Provide WildSafe Ranger presentations to local groups and underserved communities such as Pemberton and Lillooet.
- Promote the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program to local campgrounds.

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- Continued collaboration with groups such as Coast to Cascades Grizzly Bear Initiative.
- Promote the establishment of a Regional Bear Working Group.

Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”. The WCC thanks the BC Conservation Foundation, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and the Squamish-Lillooet Regional District for funding the program.

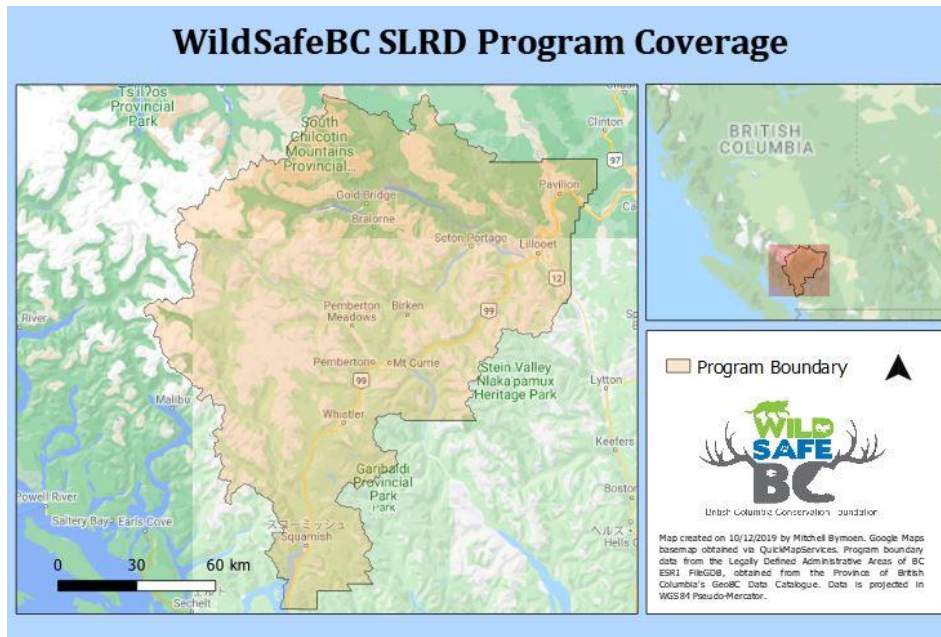


Figure 1. WildSafeBC SLRD program coverage area.



Figure 2. Map of the SLRD showing the electoral areas and member municipalities (credit: Squamish Lillooet Regional District).



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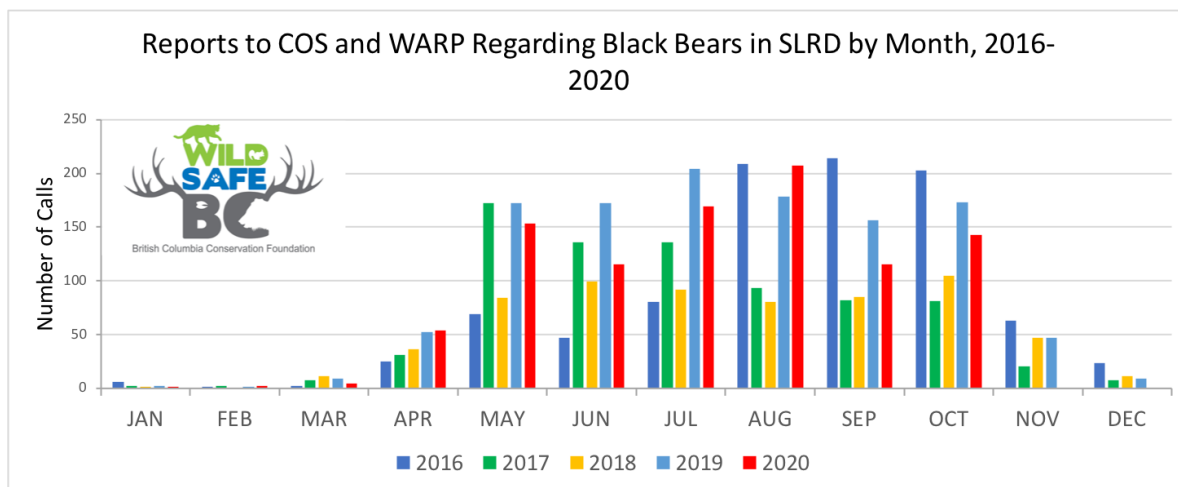
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Cover Photo: Grizzly bear entering campsite enticed by unsecured attractants (WildSafeBC file photo).

## Highlights from the 2020 Season

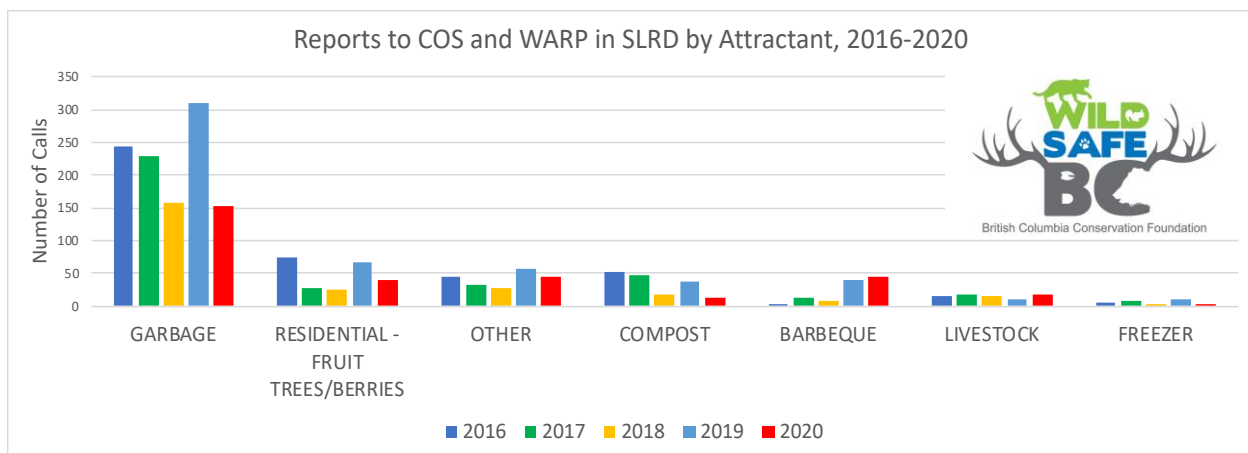
### Wildlife Activity

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) available at <https://warp.wildsafebc.com/warp/>. This data is updated daily and this report for the SLRD includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020 (Figure 3). There were 963 black bear reports which is higher than the 5 year average of 870. Of the past five years, 2020 was the second highest conflict year.



**Figure 3. Reports to COS and WARP regarding black bears in SLRD by month, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.**

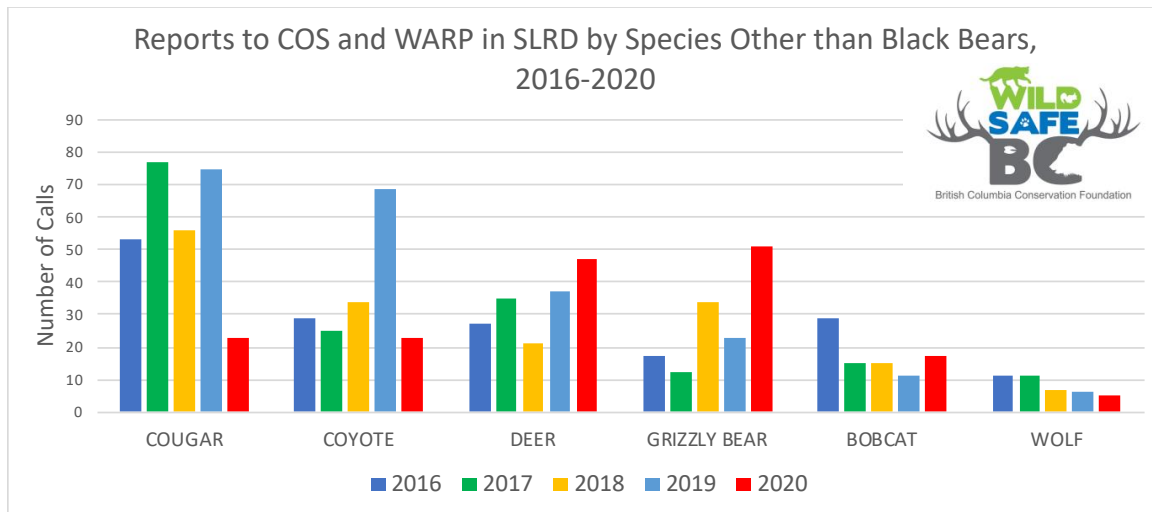
Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by fruit trees. This year shows a higher than average number of barbecues acting as attractants (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Reports to COS and WARP by attractant in SLRD, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.**

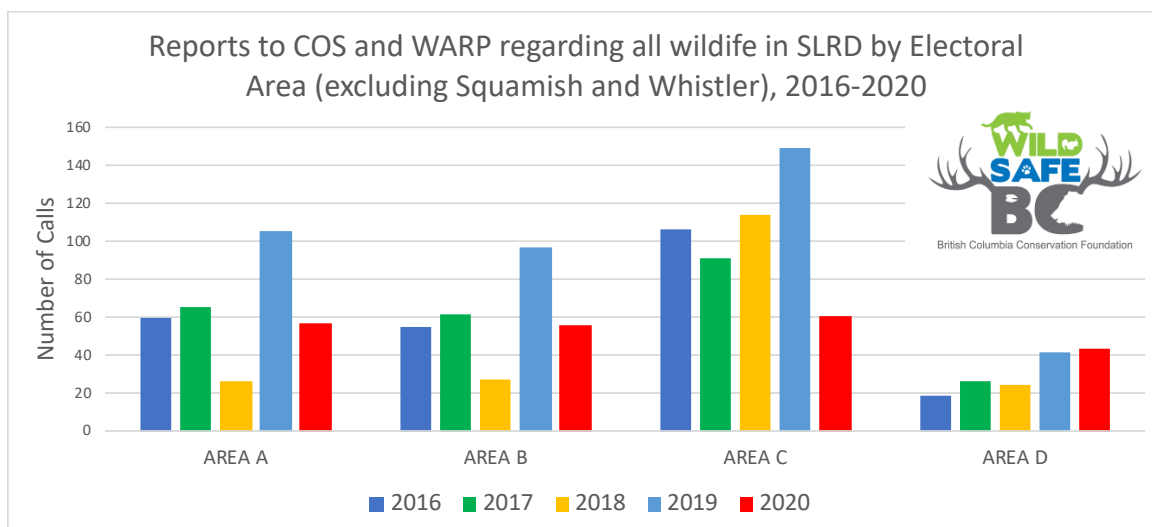
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Grizzly bear activity was also higher than average with 51 reports in 2020. Of these reports, 20 originated from Area D in September, after a small number of individuals passed through communities in the Squamish area. The Squamish-Lillooet grizzly bear population is a threatened population unit that is recovering. As grizzly bears have large territories, and the valley bottoms where people live have many sources of food, human-grizzly bear interactions are anticipated to increase. Reports for cougar, coyotes, and wolves were 66%, 54%, and 38% lower than the five-year average, respectively. Meanwhile, reports for deer and grizzly bears were 32% and 59% higher than the five-year average, respectively (Figure 5).



**Figure 5. Reports to the COS and WARP by species other than black bears, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.**

Comparison of the electoral areas in the SLRD shows that most wildlife reports originate from Area C (Figure 6).



**Figure 6. Reports to COS and WARP in SLRD by electoral area, 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

School outreach was challenging this season as a result of COVID19 restrictions. The WildSafe Ranger Program introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of 9 presentations were provided to 120 youth (Table 1)

**Table 1: Summary of WRP presentations**

School	No. Youth Reached
<b>L'École de la Vallée ( 6 presentations)</b>	80
<b>Pemberton Secondary School (2 presentations)</b>	30
<b>Gold Bridge Community School</b>	10

## Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave two presentations through webinars and outdoor demonstrations to participants.

On August 26<sup>th</sup>, 18 members of the Pemberton Off Road Cycling Association attended a Bear Spray Workshop (Figure 7). Attendees were given an overview of bear spray, safe storage, purchasing considerations, and transportation. Then, training focused on avoiding wildlife encounters and proper technique in the deployment of bear spray. Attendees gained valuable knowledge and increased their confidence for an upcoming multi-day mountain bike trip through the South Chilcotin mountains.

A wildlife awareness and safety presentation was presented through a webinar on October 8<sup>th</sup>. Promotion was done through door-to-door, at farmers' markets, and through social media. Invites were given to over 250 people and 5 members of the public attended the 90-minute presentation which touched upon predators in BC, wildlife encounters, and bear spray training.



**Figure 7. WCC hosting a bear spray workshop.**

## Display Booths

Over the season, seven display booths were held. Farmers' markets and public spaces were the primary locations where booths were set up. Display booths were visited by 264 people over the year (Table 1). Locations were chosen based on invitation, human-wildlife conflict hotspots, and areas targeted to raise wildlife awareness in the community.



Table 1. Display booths throughout the 2020 season.

Location	Reach	Date	Summary
<b>Pemberton Waste Transfer Station</b>	21	July 3	Provided information regarding responsible residential waste management and tips to avoid conflict with wildlife.
<b>One Mile Lake (Dog Beach and Parking Lot)</b>	58	July 17-18	Support COS with education around off-leash dogs in response to bear attack in OML trail network.
<b>Pemberton Farmers' Market</b>	117	August 8, October 10, 23, 30	Provided information regarding local fruit gleanings organizations, securing attractants, electric fencing, livestock husbandry, wildlife information, provided brochures and handouts.
<b>Furry Creek</b>	13	September 17	BC Goes Wild
<b>Britannia Beach</b>	25	September 19	BC Goes Wild
<b>Lillooet Farmers' Market</b>	30	September 25	Provided information regarding local fruit gleanings organizations, livestock husbandry, securing residential solid waste, wildlife information, provided brochures and handouts. Connected with Director Birch-Jones, DOL Bylaw Officer Jennifer Davidson, and members of the Naturalist Society.

## 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 the province. Throughout the third week of September, the WCC hosted display booths in collaboration with the SLRD Solid Waste Recovery Coordinator and the COS. There were two events that took place at the parking lot of Olivers' Landing residence in Furry Creek and at the local playground in Britannia Beach. A total of 38 people visited the info booths and received information about the role of the COS, strategies for coexisting with the wildlife in their community, and statistics from a recent SLRD solid waste audit. Children were provided take home activity kits and colouring sheets to participate in the 2020 WildSafe Rangers contest. The event was well received, and residents expressed their support for having a wildlife coordinator present within their communities.

## 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 is typically done. While this reduced face-to-face conversations, it did allow for more coverage of the area. The Furry Creek and Britannia Beach neighborhoods were prioritized for this activity to increase wildlife awareness and coexistence strategies within the community. Pemberton Meadows was canvassed to encourage responsible storage and curbside placement of garbage totes among residents. Upper Squamish Valley was also canvassed in response to a number of grizzly bear sightings in the neighbourhood in September. A total of 350 people were reached.

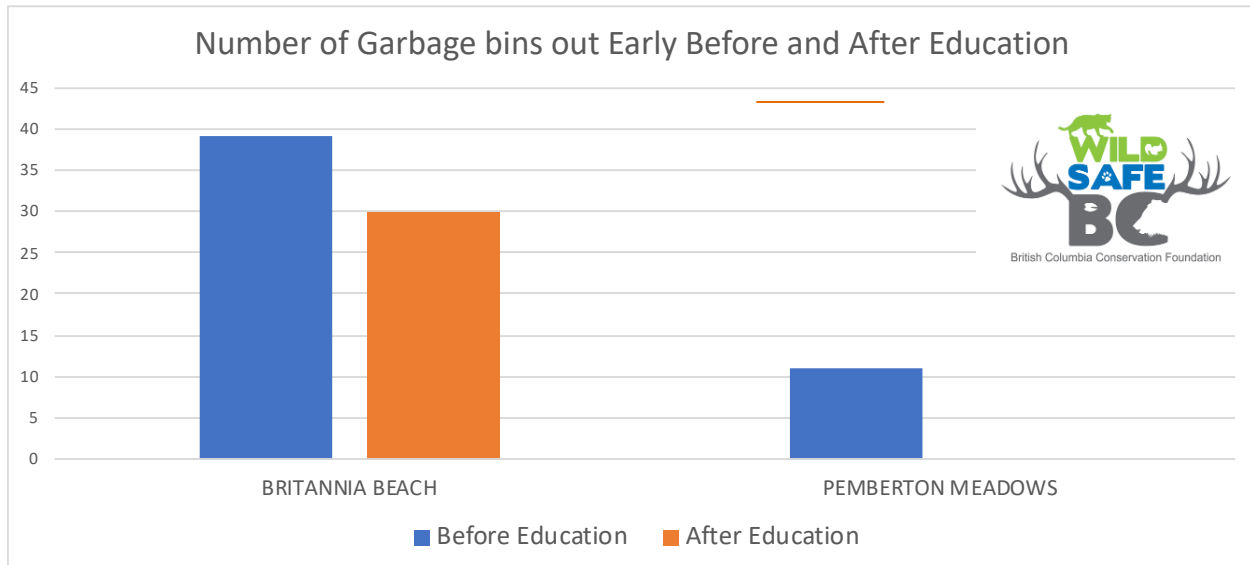
Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection (Figure 8). During 6 outings, a total of 129 bins were tagged in the SLRD and 107 were in Britannia Beach. Of these 107, 11 were identified as repeat offenders. Bin tagging also occurred in the Pemberton Meadows Trailer Park and 11 bins received education stickers for being placed curbside the night before collection. Warning stickers were placed on the bins and door hangers were circulated to encourage residents to place containers out on the day of collection only.



**Figure 8. WCC placing a warning sticker on a garbage bin placed on the curb outside of collection hours.**

The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours is demonstrated by 23% of residences in Britannia Beach and 100% of the residences in Pemberton Meadows whose bins were tagged during the initial survey and then were not found on the curb again during the second survey in the Meadows trailer park (Figure 9). In Furry Creek, the number of tagged bins

hovered between two and four between initial and follow up surveys and two repeat offenders were identified.



**Figure 9. Number of totes placed out early for collection before and after education activities SLRD.**

The WCC created a curbside collection map for the Pemberton Meadows to facilitate future garbage tagging initiatives. This map identifies over 70 locations where residential curbside collection occurred in 2020.

## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Squamish Lillooet RD page grew 9% in 2020 from 770 to 858 followers. The WCC submitted two news articles to the Pique Newsmagazine and Squamish Chief and had one radio interview with Mountain FM. Press releases focused on managing attractants. These were well received and generated several phone calls and leads for further education opportunities (<https://www.squamishchief.com/news/local-news/slrd-brings-in-wildsafebc-community-co-ordinator-1.24152611> & <https://www.piquenewsmagazine.com/whistler-news/cos-high-number-of-bear-calls-2707069>).

## Wildlife in Area Signs

Two bear in area signs were installed in Pemberton at trailheads around One Mile Lake. This followed a request for support from the COS after a bear attack occurred on the Lumpy's Epic trail. These signs were left up for several weeks and removed once the COS determined the bears had left the area.

## Collaborations

The WildSafeBC Program has been well supported and received by organizations and residents throughout the SLRD. WildSafeBC supported the COS throughout the season by sharing wildlife alerts on social media, installing wildlife in areas signs and increasing education efforts in human-wildlife conflict hotspots. WildSafeBC also collaborated with Coast to Cascades Grizzly Bear Initiative and participated in the design and installation of an electric fence at the N'Quatqua Trout Hatchery. The electric fence is currently operational and will prevent further wildlife conflict at the hatchery. Coast to Cascades and WildSafeBC shared social media events and posts as appropriate. WildSafeBC also shared the Pemberton Fruit Tree Project social media callouts for harvesting volunteers. Recreation Sites and Trails BC allowed the WCC to install and distribute educational materials in campsite locations throughout the SLRD, leading to increased visitor education and wildlife safety.

## WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

The WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program (WBCP) 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. Introduction of the WBCP to operators throughout the SLRD is ongoing and should be prioritized next year.

In addition to the WBCP, the WCC visited 7 recreation sites within the SLRD to install Bare Camping infographics and engage with site guests. A total of 170 recreation site users received Bare Camping brochure material and the WCC engaged in safe camping conversations with engaged campers.

## Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

This summer, a local N'Quatqua member was contracted by the Coast to Cascades Grizzly Bear Initiative for implementing Bear Hazard Assessment recommendations. WildSafeBC was made aware of an opportunity to assist in electric fencing installation, alongside the Coast to Cascades Grizzly Bear Initiative Community Co-Existence Coordinator. This initiative established relationships with local N'Quatqua members and Coast to Cascades and provided the WCC with electric fencing experience.

Lil'wat members in Mount Currie, as well as St'at'imc Government Services in Lillooet had contacted WildSafeBC directly regarding bear conflicts. This demonstrates a need in the community for education and cooperation in conflict prevention and wildlife encounters

Stl'atl'imx Tribal Police Service at the Lil'wat Office were very receptive to the WildSafeBC program and accepted brochure and door hangers that were offered to them by the WCC. These materials can serve as a resource for the Tribal Police to use when responding to human-wildlife conflict in Mount Currie.



## Challenges and Opportunities

This was the first year the WildSafeBC Program was operating in the SLRD and a new WCC filled the position. Relationships with residents, communities, and organizations required time to develop. In addition, the large coverage area of the program required efficient planning when traveling to various parts of the Regional District. Many outreach activities were impacted by COVID-19 mitigation measures. Despite these challenges, WildSafeBC was able to successfully modify their traditional outreach activities and take advantage of new technologies to continue to deliver their program safely and effectively.

Garbage remained as the most reported attractant which drew bears into SLRD communities. Garbage tagging and door-to-door canvassing were effective strategies in reducing conflict, however more work needs to be done to reduce the number of garbage and compost totes placed out early.

Fruit trees continued to draw wildlife into residential areas in the SLRD and are often underreported as a source of conflict. Bears were reported damaging fences and remaining in close proximity to residents which impacted the safety of the community. Several areas represented hotspots in the community and would benefit to increased education and fruit gleaning activities in the future. To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives are recommended for 2021:

- Electric fence demonstrations
- Education campaigns through social media, news articles, workshops, flyers sent out with municipal notices
- Explore collaborations with local food banks, other non-profits, and cideries
- Connect residents through social media food sharing groups
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots

One of the challenges this season was the reluctance of the public to report bear conflicts to the COS RAPP line until the animals became seriously food-conditioned or were a serious threat to public safety. When conflicts are reported early and attractant issues are identified, it is possible to take a more proactive approach. Promotion of WildSafeBC's WARP is a priority as it allows the public to view local wildlife reports and take proactive measures in response. While many reports are shared on private social media groups, this omits a large segment of the population not active in these platforms.

Since grizzly bear sightings are relatively rare compared to black bear interactions, the communities need to be prepared for the potential for increased encounters. This includes more education on the bear biology and behaviours of both bear species and conflict reduction strategies. Electric fencing can be a critical tool for reducing conflicts, especially in rural areas.

Another focus for next season should be the expansion of communities currently underserved such as Lillooet, and communities in the Bridge River Valley such as Bralorne and Gold Bridge.

Further collaborations with local coordinators, First Nations and Coast to Cascades will help strengthen partnerships and increase support for local community members.

Many areas of the province, including the Sea to Sky Corridor, are experiencing surges in camping and day use. WildSafeBC's Bare Campsite Program is a ready-made solution to support local campground operators in reducing conflicts with wildlife and increased public awareness.

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses good examples in their community on how to safely co-exist with wildlife. The WCC introduced the program to three business in the District of Lillooet which was well received. Despite not having any businesses take the pledge it remains an initiative that should be prioritized in next year.

Communications and the sharing of best practices could be facilitated through the establishment of a regional bear working group.

## Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF), the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and the SLRD for funding the WildSafeBC SLRD program in 2020. The BCCF and SLRD teams were vital in the delivery of the program. The WCC would like to acknowledge SLRD Solid Waste Recovery Coordinator Maire-Lou Leblanc, SLRD Directors Rainbow and Birch-Jones, Conservation Officers Sgt. Simon Gravel, Brittany Mueller, Erich Habrich, Bylaw Officers Jennifer Davidson and Lee Nancy, the Coast to Cascades Grizzly Bear Initiative team, the Lillooet Naturalist Society, Jacquie Rasmussen and the Lillooet Regional Invasive Species Society, the Pemberton Fruit Tree Project, Recreation Sites and Trails BC, the Pemberton Off Road Cycling Association, the Pemberton Farmers' Market Association, and the Lillooet Farmers' Market for assisting in accomplishing program goals.