

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2020

Sunshine Coast

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast Program between May 11 and November 30, 2020. The program area is the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) which encompasses the land between Howe Sound and Jervis Inlet and the traditional territories of the shíshálh (Sechelt) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) nations. Due to large mountain ranges, the Sunshine Coast is only accessible by ferry. The SCRD includes:

- Area A: Pender Harbour and Egmont
- Area B: Halfmoon Bay
- Area D: Roberts Creek
- Area E: Elphinstone
- Area F: West Howe Sound
- District of Sechelt (DOS)
- Sechelt Indian Government District (SIGD or shíshálh Nation)
- Town of Gibsons (TOG)

Local wildlife activity during the 2020 season was below average but still substantial. Early season had some conflicts with cougars primarily in Roberts Creek, a wolf pack on Gambier Island, and black bear conflict across the region. More rainfall and lower temperatures throughout the season resulted in abundant natural food sources for wildlife; however, there were still instances of black bears accessing human-sourced attractants such as garbage and fruit trees as the fall season approached.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities 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. Outreach activities included:

- 19 WildSafe Rangers Program (WRP) presentations to 23 classes reaching 386 youth
- 549 door hangers were placed at homes and the WCC spoke with 94 people
- 42 garbage and compost bins were tagged over 9 nights
- 2 farmers' market display booths interacting with 170 people
- 69 attendees at the BC Goes Wild Day at Porpoise Bay (which included a display booth and games)
- 46 campers reached at Porpoise Bay Provincial Park while going campsite to campsite providing information on bear sightings and attraction management in collaboration with BC Parks Rangers
- Supported the SCRD with green bin participation checks travelling 3 collection routes over a two-week period in October with garbage tagging activities in the weeks that followed
- 80 new Facebook followers for a total of 1,196 pages likes

The success of the Sunshine Coast WildSafeBC program would not be possible without the support of the Sunshine Coast Regional District, the Conservation Officer Service (COS), and amazing volunteers. There are many opportunities to further engage the community through the WildSafe Business Pledge, Bare Campsite Program, and WRP in 2021, especially if COVID-19 restrictions are eased and there are more opportunities for in person activities. Challenges may

arise as residents of the SCR D adjust to the new green bin program and as residents of the District of Sechelt prepare for the launch of their green bin program in 2021. Education and outreach through social and traditional media will be useful tools for supporting residents. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

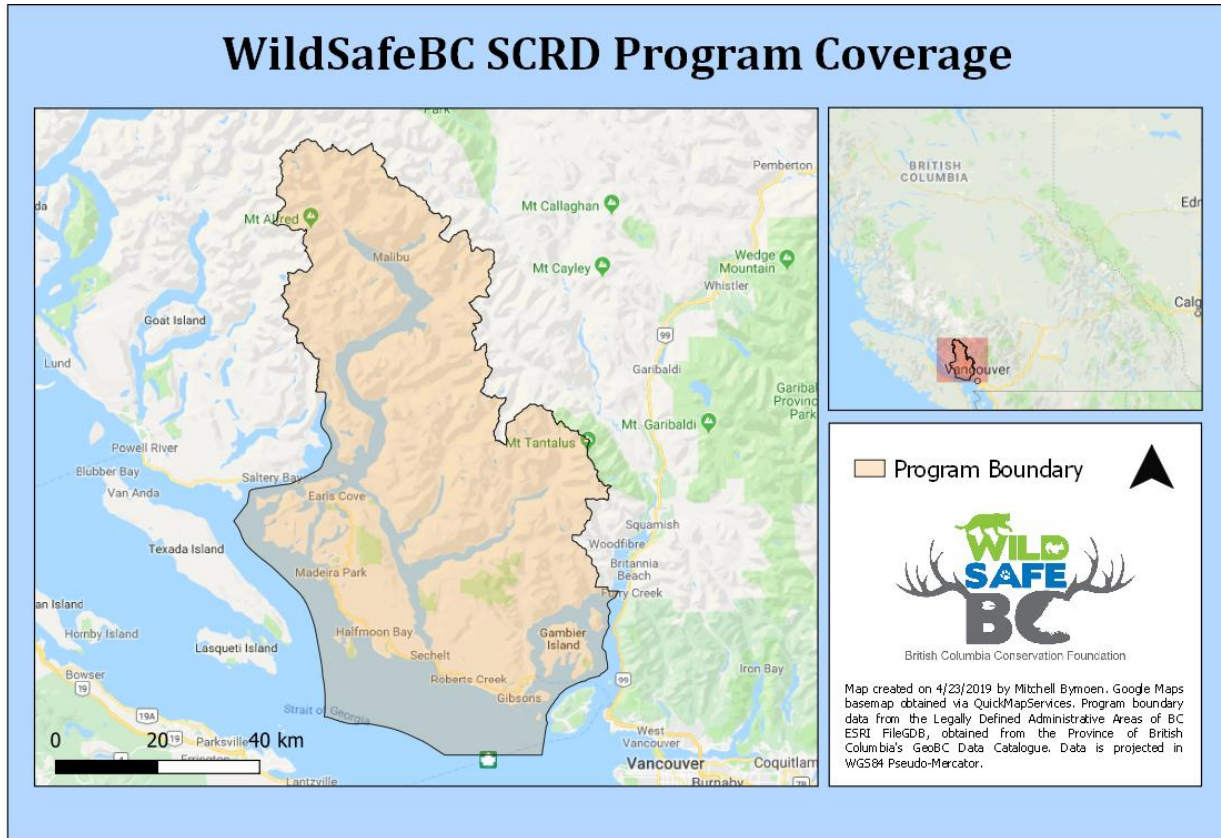


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program coverage area.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2020 Season	4
Wildlife Activity	4
WildSafeBC COVID-19 Mitigation.....	6
WildSafe Ranger Program.....	6
Display Booths and BC Goes Wild	7
Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging	9
Social Media and Press	10
Wildlife in Area Signs.....	10
Collaborations	10
Indigenous Awareness and Engagement	11
Special Initiatives.....	11
Challenges and Opportunities	11
Acknowledgements.....	13
Addendum	14

Table of Figures

Figure 1. WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program coverage area.	
Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP by species from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.	4
Figure 3. Black bear reports to COS and WARP in SCR D by attractant, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.	5
Figure 4. Reports to COS and WARP regarding black bears in SCR D by month, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.	5
Table 1. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2020.	6
Table 2. WildSafeBC display booths in 2020.....	7
Figure 5. Display booth at Gibsons Farmers' Market August 30, 2020.	7
Figure 6. Bear run at BC Goes Wild event at Porpoise Bay September 5, 2020. Photo: John Maddalozzo	8
Figure 7. Garbage tagging July 6, 2020.	
Figure 8. Bear in area sign placed at a trailhead experiencing higher bear activity.....	
Figure 9. Bear accessing dumpster. Photo: Wayne Czernicki	12

Cover Photo: Display Booth at Sechelt Farmers' and Artisans' Market August 22, 2020

Highlights from the 2020 Season

Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (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) on the WildSafeBC website. This data is updated daily and this report for the Sunshine Coast includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

From January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020, there were 1,920 wildlife reports made to the COS and WARP for the Sunshine Coast Regional District areas. The top three species reported were black bear (n=1,205), deer (n=282), and cougar (n=246) (Figure 2). Calls regarding coyote (n=39) and other (n=148) made up the balance of calls.

From January 1, 2020 to October 31, 2020 there were 324 wildlife reports made to the COS and WARP. Of those, 186 were regarding black bears, 67 were deer-related, 23 cougar, 15 coyote, and 33 other wildlife reports.

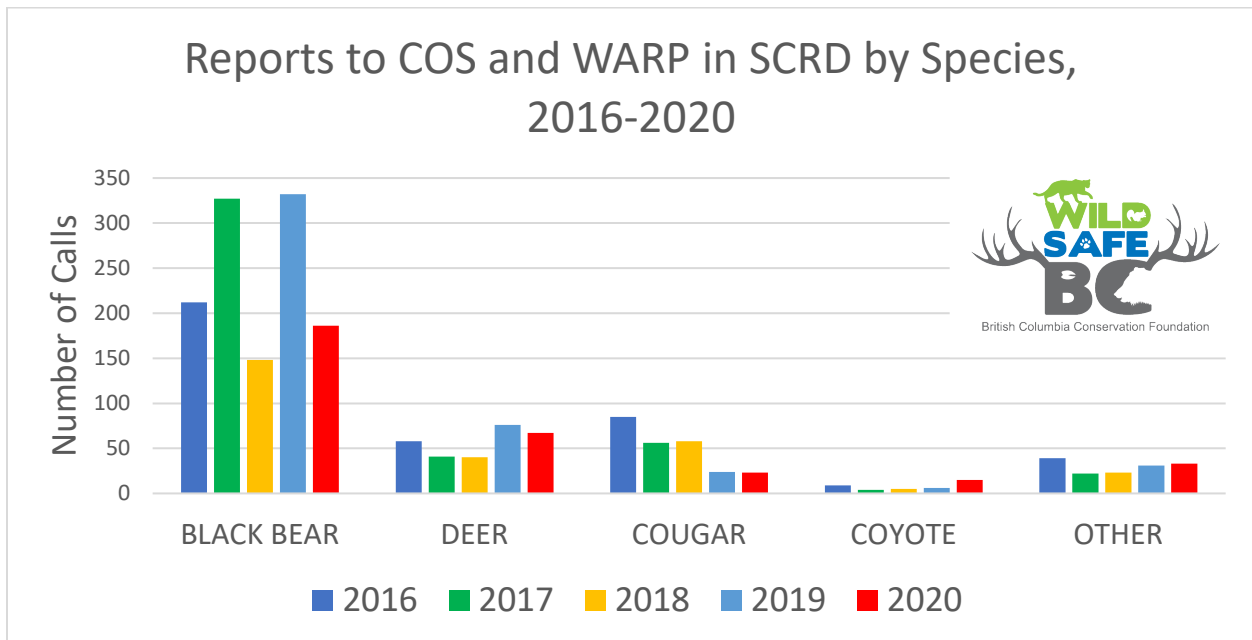


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP by species from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

Garbage (n=44) remained the most reported black bear attractant followed by 'other' (n=17), residential fruit trees (n=11), and livestock (n=8) (Figure 3). Reports regarding fruit trees were much lower in 2020. However, there were reports through bylaw officers and residents regarding fruit trees as well as feedback from door-to-door activities, display booths, and WildSafe Ranger presentations that indicate this attractant is under-reported.

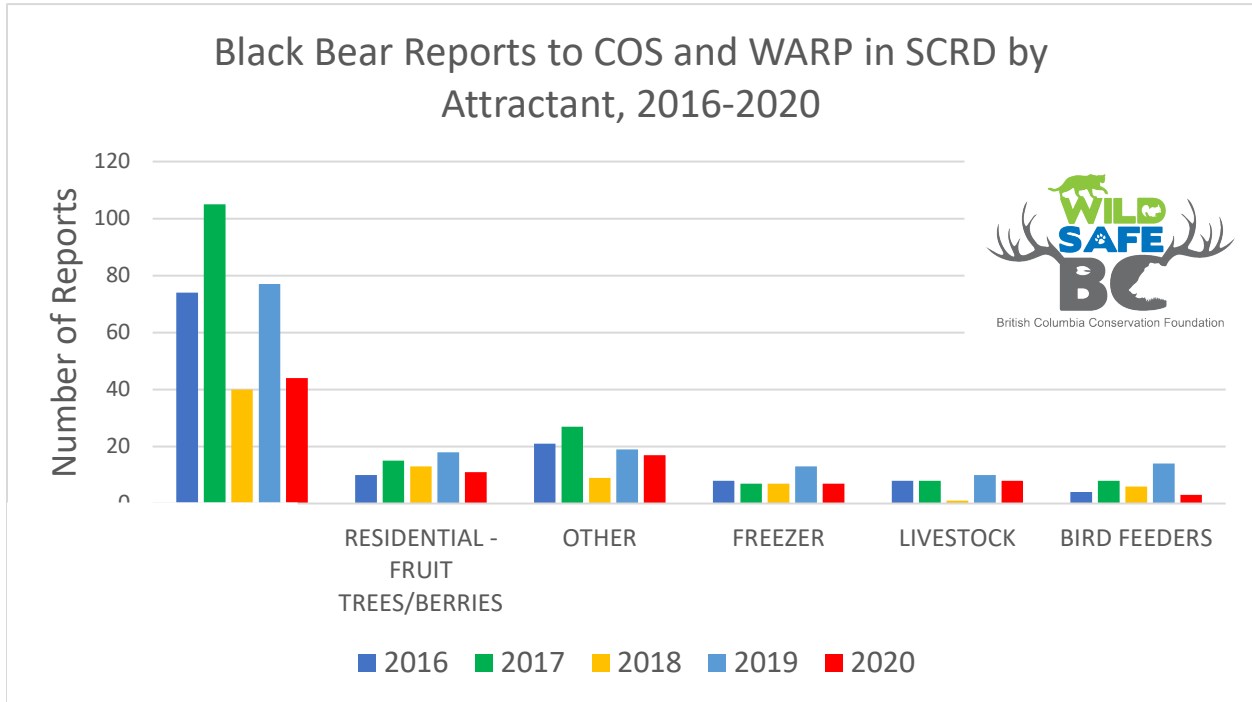


Figure 3. Black bear reports to COS and WARP in SCR D by attractant, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

While black bear reports by month were lower in 2020, they follow the annual trend with peaks in May-June and again in September-October (Figure 4).

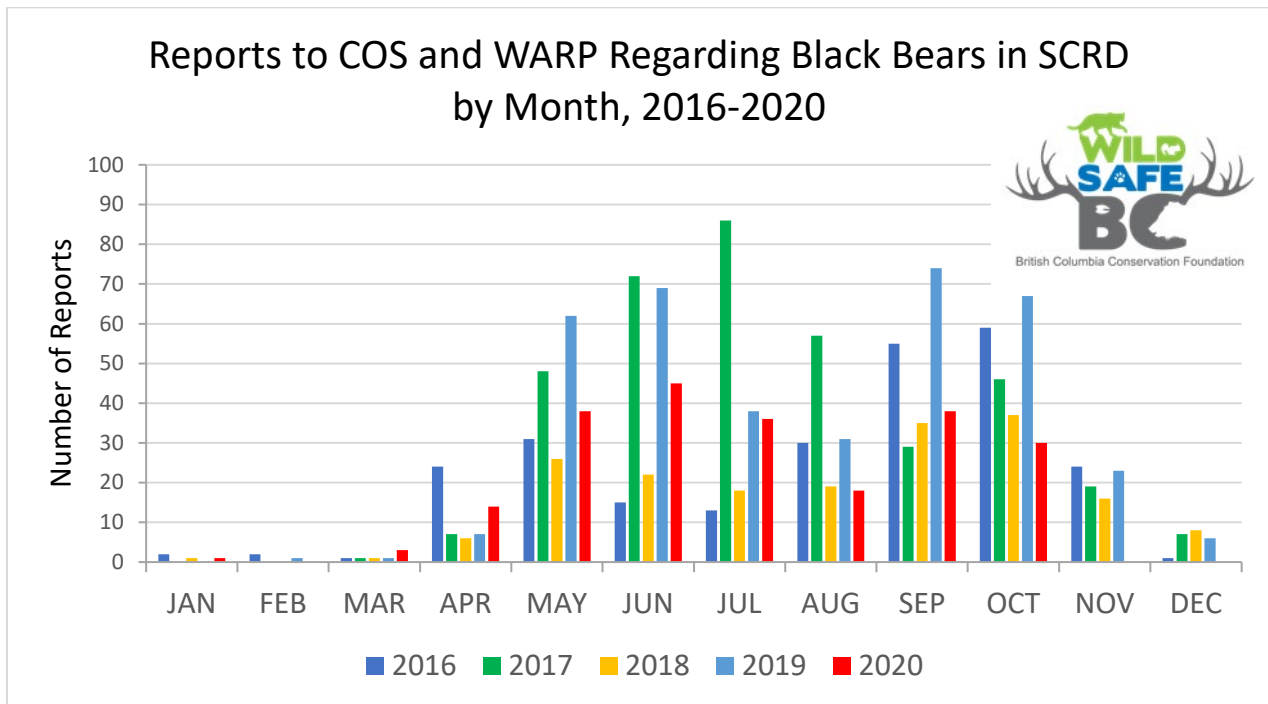


Figure 4. Reports to COS and WARP regarding black bears in SCR D by month, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

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 23 classes participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program; 1 through webinar in the spring and 22 classes through outdoor presentations in the fall. In total, 386 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits which include a take home assignment on attractant management to review with parents (Table 1). One volunteer assisted with 5 presentations and Elyse Guzek, BC Parks Ranger Area Supervisor, collaborated on one presentation. Unfortunately, COVID-19 directives prevented further participation from BC Parks for this season.

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

School	Grade	Students	Format
Langdale Elementary	3/4	22	Zoom (spring)
Langdale Elementary	All classes, K-7	81	Outdoors (fall)
Kinnikinnick Elementary	K/1	12	Outdoors (fall)
Cedar Grove Elementary	5/6	25	Outdoors (fall)
Roberts Creek Elementary	1/2, 2/3	70	Outdoors (fall)
Davis Bay Elementary NEST Program	K-3	40	Outdoors (fall)
Gibsons Elementary	3/4	36	Outdoors (fall)
West Sechelt Elementary	1/2	40	Outdoors (fall)
SPIDER	K-7	30	Outdoors (fall)
Halfmoon Bay Elementary	4/5	23	Outdoors (fall)
Homeschool Group	1-6	7	Outdoors (fall)
TOTAL		386	

Display Booths and BC Goes Wild

Display booths were set up at a total of three events, including the BC Goes Wild event reaching a total of 239 people (Table 2).

Table 2. WildSafeBC display booths in 2020.

Date	Event	# of people
August 22, 2020	Sechelt Farmers' and Artisans' Market	80
August 30, 2020	Gibsons Farmers Market	90
September 5, 2020	BC Goes Wild	69
	TOTAL	239

The farmers' markets were a great way to connect with residents and tourists alike (Figure 5). People enjoyed learning interesting facts about wildlife, how to use bear spray, what to do in an encounter, and attractant management.



Figure 5. Display booth at Gibsons Farmers' Market August 30, 2020.

The display booth at the BC Goes Wild event drew in most of the attendees as they were given prizes and resources for participating in the activities.

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. To kick off the month of awareness building, the Sunshine Coast BC Goes Wild event was hosted Saturday September 5, 2020 at Porpoise Bay Provincial Park from 10 am to 2 pm.

Given the necessary COVID-19 mitigation measures, it was decided to keep the public event low-key with no specific times for people to participate in the hopes of having a steady crowd and not large groups gathering at once for a presentation or talk. This approach worked well, and the large layout of the event made it easy for people to stick with their groups/families.

The Bear Run was the big hit of the day! Kids and parents enjoyed trying to run 13 metres as fast as they could (Figure 6). Most people took around 3 seconds and the fastest time was 2.36 seconds! Still not fast enough to outrun a bear. The Cougar Leap was also a successful game but not as popular as the run. It took people between 5 and 12 leaps to make it 40 feet.

Messaging focused on the statistics that bears can run up to 13 metres per second and cougars can leap up to 40 feet (12.2m) in one bound to emphasize that we are to never run from wildlife. Parents were especially impressed by the stats and kids loved getting a tattoo or pin as well as the colouring/drawing contest sheets and colouring books for participating.



Figure 6. Bear run at BC Goes Wild event at Porpoise Bay September 5, 2020. Photo: John Maddalozzo

Four volunteers helped make the event a success. One person took some great pictures while the others helped run the games and hand out prizes and information.

Overall, at least 69 people attended the event with the actual number of attendees likely closer to 80 people, most of whom were campers at the park; however, at least 4 people referenced reading about it in the paper.

BC Parks Rangers Elyse and Jordan were on site during the event visiting campsites with information on attractant management and inviting campers to the event. This was a great way to engage campers and promote the event. They also supplied newly released and fantastic educational resources on wildlife and the environment that were a great addition to the WildSafeBC items. While the COS were unable to attend, information on the COS was available at the information booth.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education was modified this year to consist of leaving door hangers with a letter attached addressing the purpose of the visit. Due to COVID-19, the WCC did not knock on doors as has been done in the past. However, if people were outside, the WCC would engage in conversation and education. In total, 549 door hangers were left and conversations were had with 94 people in the neighbourhoods of Oceanview Drive (Elphinstone), Langdale (Howe Sound), Egmont (Pender Harbour & Egmont), Turnstone Drive (Sechelt), Elphinstone Avenue, Granthams Landing (Elphinstone), Marion Place (Elphinstone), Francis Peninsula and Maderia Park (Pender Harbour), and San Souci Road area (Halfmoon Bay). These areas were prioritized as a result of reports of black bears accessing garbage or fruit on trees, or entering homes, sheds, and/or vehicles.

Garbage, or organics, bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the evening before collection (Figure 7). During 9 outings, a total of 42 bins were tagged in the District of Sechelt, Langdale, Elphinstone, Roberts Creek, and Halfmoon Bay with only two repeat offenders. This demonstrates the effectiveness of bin tagging for changing human behaviours.



Figure 7. Garbage tagging July 6, 2020.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast Facebook page grew by 80 fans in 2020 from 1,116 to 1,196 page followers. This platform was an effective way to communicate region-specific information about wildlife activity such as the rash of black bears breaking into vehicles in the Secret Cove Area. This particular post had a reach of over 4,000 people. Sharing informative WARP updates were also very popular posts.

The WCC provide information to local media and submitted several news releases which resulted in the following articles:

- Coast Reporter announcing the start of a new WildSafe season, [WildSafeBC coordinator hired for Sunshine Coast](#)
- Coast Reporter also consulted the WCC regarding a habituated bear in Langdale, [Langdale residents deal with 'extremely' habituated bear](#)
- BC Goes Wild event was run in both regional newspapers: The Local, [BC Goes Wild celebrating wildlife](#) and the Coast Reporter, ['BC Goes Wild' event Sept. 5 in Porpoise Bay Provincial Park](#)
- An end of season press release was distributed in late November. The Coast Reporter ran the story with additional information not supplied by WildSafeBC, [WildSafeBC finished for season, SCRD mulls dropping program](#)

Wildlife in Area Signs

While wildlife can be expected on trails throughout the Sunshine Coast, there are times when wildlife activity increases in hotspots and signage can be helpful in preventing conflicts. It is important for residents and visitors using trails to be aware of their surroundings, make noise with their voice, and keep dogs under control or on a leash.

Wildlife in Area signs were placed at various hotspots along the Sunshine Coast as directed by the COS, bylaw officers, SCRD sponsor, and residents (Figure 8). Signs were typically left for 1-2 weeks, depending on the situation and location.



Figure 8. Bear in area sign placed at a trailhead experiencing higher bear activity.

Collaborations

Working closely with the COS is instrumental to this role. By providing consistent messaging and education to our community members, the WCC and the COS were able to help support different neighbourhoods dealing with human-wildlife conflict.

A great relationship was built with BC Parks Rangers to help with camper education and in hosting the BCGW event. A BC Park Ranger collaborated on the delivery of one WildSafe

Rangers presentation with the intention of doing more, however, COVID-19 restrictions prevented further collaboration in 2020.

Working with other wildlife groups such as the Sunshine Coast Bear Alliance and Bear and Safety Awareness on the Sunshine Coast help serve an important role of extra education and awareness building. Connecting with these groups to collaborate on consistent messaging to the public helps make our work more effective at reducing conflict and increasing public safety.

The WCC also connected with Sunshine Coast Tourism and appreciates the support in providing wildlife safety messaging and best practices for visitors to the area.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

During COVID-19, the shíshálh Nation closed its roads to non-residents. However, as an essential service, it was confirmed that if urgent outreach was needed, the WCC would be welcomed and encouraged to provide education and outreach to the community. As conflicts were low this season, this was deferred to the following season. Upon request, the WCC was able to provide information to shíshálh Nation on acquiring bear-resistant bins for their parks and public spaces.

Special Initiatives

The SCRCD launched a curbside organics collection service in October 2020. The WCC supported this new initiative by providing best practices and tips for managing waste on the Facebook page, performing participation and contamination checks during the first two weeks of the program, and performing garbage tagging surveys in the months of October and November. See the garbage tagging section for more information.

The Parent Advisory Committee at Gibsons Elementary reached out to the WCC to help assess wildlife safety along trails and routes to school as part of a Best Routes to School initiative within School District 46. The WCC and a committee member walked some of the trails outlined as best routes to walk or bike to school and identified wildlife attractants such as unsecured garbage bins and berry bushes and management methods such as clearing underbrush or trimming back blind corners.

Challenges and Opportunities

Unsecured garbage remains a challenge in the community (Figure 9). As collection and service levels vary along the coast, messaging needs to focus on various ways to safely store waste throughout the week as well as on collection day. Increasing awareness and education for users of commercial bins can be achieved through the use of decals (Addendum). The introduction of curbside organics collection in the SCRCD presents opportunities for waste management and waste reduction education.



Figure 9. Bear accessing dumpster. Photo: Wayne Czernicki

Fruit and nut trees continue to be a source of attractants in the community that draw wildlife into residential areas. Bears have been reported damaging fences and remaining in people's yards and even entering homes which impacts the safety of the neighbourhood. To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives could be implemented in 2021:

- Electric fence demonstration
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information
- Explore fruit-gleaning options with food banks and other non-profits
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots
- Mobilize and train volunteers to help with outreach year-round

Further engagement through the use of WildSafeBC's Business Pledge and Bare Campsite programs will be a great opportunity to increase local knowledge of wildlife and attractant management. By educating and engaging with business owners and employees, the WCC would be able to engage with residents while providing them with the tools to help educate visitors to the Sunshine Coast.

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to set 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. Several businesses expressed interest this season, however challenges with COVID-19 and scheduling training resulted in postponing further progress until 2021.

The WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program was a new initiative in 2020. Through the program, WildSafeBC provides clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. Campgrounds have expressed interest; however, training and implementation would be best completed in early 2021.

Other opportunities such as consistent “Welcome to Wildlife Country” posters and messaging along the Sunshine Coast would help to emphasize our shared habitat with wildlife. Wayfinding signs at trail heads, posters at visitor information centres and roadside stops, and posters on BC Ferries outlining safe practices for living and visiting wildlife country are examples of ways to promote safe coexistence with wildlife.

Acknowledgements

The Sunshine Coast WildSafeBC program would not be possible without the financial and personnel support of the SCRDC and the BCCF. The WCC would like to thank Robyn Cooper and Andrea Patrao with the SCRDC Solid Waste department for their guidance. Sgt. Dean Miller and Leyland Klassen with the COS, Anne Nikodem and Greg Horning DOS bylaw, Sue Booth TOG bylaw Elyse Guzek and Jordan Dooley with BC Parks for supporting the program’s education and outreach. And a big thank you to volunteer superstar Denise Burns.

Addendum



Help keep wildlife wild!
Prevent access to
garbage.

Keep Bin CLOSED At All Times

Keep surrounding area clean
Do not overfill container
Ensure lid is properly secured

www.wildsafebc.com

