

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2020

## qathet Regional District

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## Executive Summary

This report describes activities of the WildSafeBC qathet Regional District program between May 11 and November 30, 2020. For the sixth consecutive year, WildSafeBC has delivered programming to the coverage areas of Saltery Bay to Lund, including the City of Powell River, the Tla'amin First Nations community and beyond into Desolation Sound. The qathet Regional District is located within the traditional territory of the Tla'amin, shíshálh and K'ómoks First Nations. The coverage area also includes the outer lying islands of Lasqueti, Texada and Savary (Figure 1). In total there are approximately 20,000 residents.

Local reports to the Conservation Officer Services (COS) to date were lower than the 2019 season, however calls were average from all other years since 2016. The reduction of human-wildlife reports this year is likely due to the abundance of natural food sources. The Wildwood and Westview neighborhoods had the highest reports, with Cranberry also having a significant number, but less than in 2019. From January 1 to October 31, black bears remained the most reported species for a total of 152 reports, followed by deer at 66. Deer conflicts have been on the rise and a number of deer were reported as injured this year. The top attractant for bears remains garbage, although the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) believes that residential fruit and nut trees were a major attractant this year and may not have been reported or viewed as a source of conflict by some residents. The WCC continues to educate on why early calls to the COS are important for the safety of wildlife and the community.

This season was quite different from past years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, WildSafeBC was able to modify the program to deliver it safely and effectively. The program was put forth through social media, information booths, door-to-door canvassing by way of informative door hangers, in person presentations and through Zoom. The program has been widely accepted and recognized throughout the community and continues to increase public knowledge and inspire behavioural change around attractant management.

Program activities included five WildSafe Ranger presentations to 95 children; 1 bear spray workshop for the BC Goes Wild event; over 420 residents reached through door-to-door canvassing; and 5 display booths at trailheads and local businesses reaching 173 people. Additional outreach through social media saw an increase in followers of over 30% on the WildSafeBC Facebook qathet Regional District Facebook page from 705 to 915. The WCC also successfully introduced the WildSafe Business Pledge and had 10 businesses complete the pledge.

WildSafeBC developed a list of recommended links for local websites featuring important wildlife information for residents and visitors. These were shared and utilized by many organizations including the qathet Regional District, Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society, Tourism Powell River, Royal LePage and Zaikow Realty.

A Bear Smart working group began forming and will continue to develop over the winter 2020 to be ready to come together early spring 2021. Some projects being explored include wildlife signage for the Millennium Trails, bylaw amendments, bear-resistant bin cost share programs and Bear Smart waste management plans. In the coming seasons, the qathet Regional District would benefit greatly from bylaw amendments on waste management and wildlife attractants including storage. A bear-resistant bin cost share program would allow residents in high conflict

areas to access affordable bins upon request. Working towards becoming a Bear Smart Community in the future would bring together many of these current concerns.

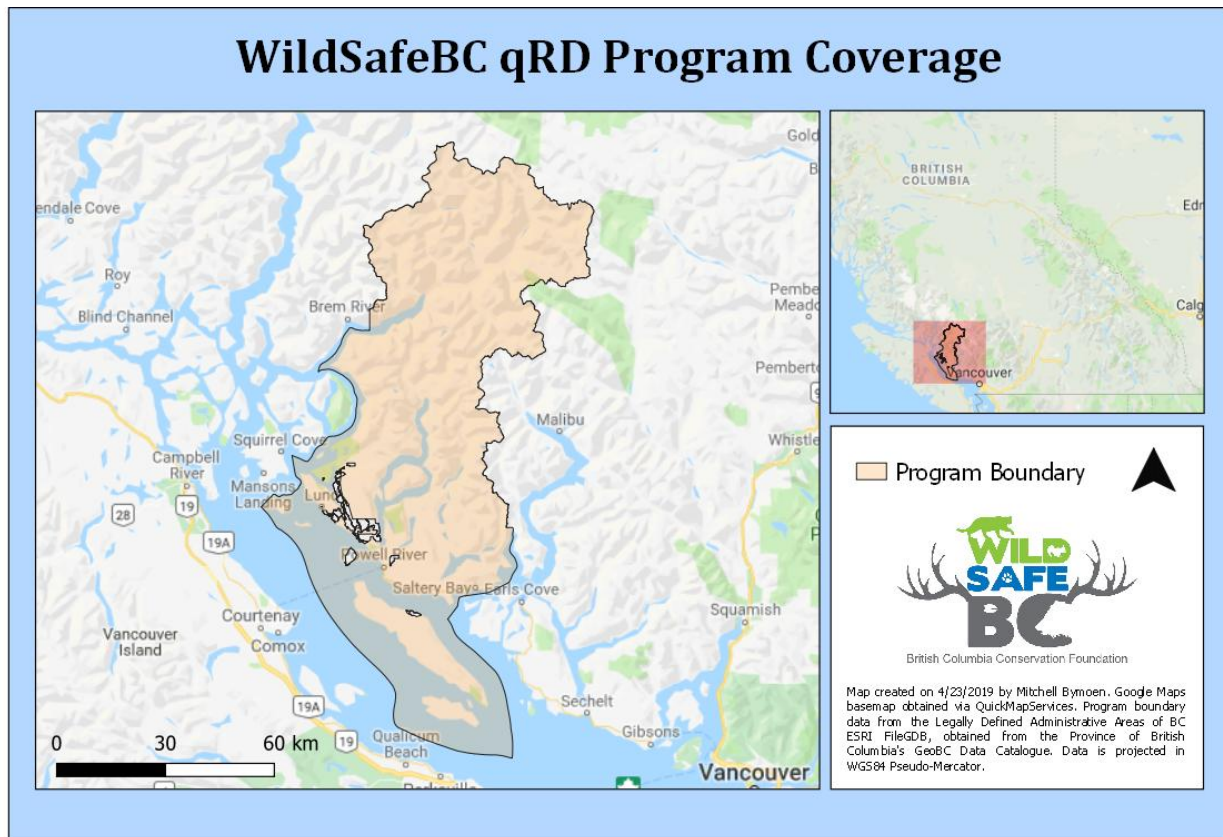


Figure 1. WildSafeBC qathet Regional District (qRD) Program coverage area.

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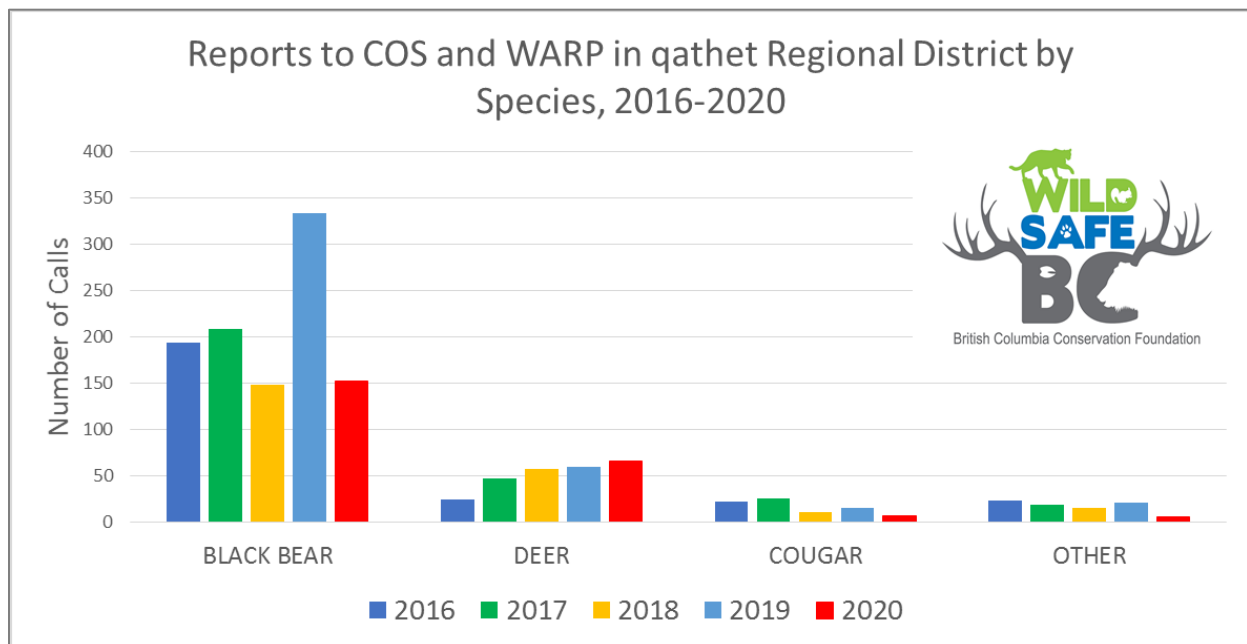
Cover Photo: Savary Island deer, qathet Regional District, Krystle Mitchelitis, 2019



## 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 WildSafeBC's website. This data is updated daily and this report for the qathet Regional District (qRD) includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020 (Figure 2). It is important to keep in mind that many wildlife sightings and human-wildlife conflict go unreported and the figures below do not represent all conflict in the community.



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

There were 152 black bear reports so far in 2020, which is on track to be an average year (Figure 3). Deer populations in our community have increased and have resulted in more reports of injured deer and increased conflict.

Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by residential fruit trees (Figure 4). Many residents do not report when black bears are in their residential fruit or nut tree. It is likely that this attractant is associated with more conflicts than has been reported to the COS.

There were two separate conflict incidents with dogs in which the dogs were killed by a black bear. One dog was in its fenced backyard, in Townsite and the bear broke in and took the small dog while the owners were home. The second incident occurred in the Tla'amin community where an old dog, who was used to chasing away bears, was also taken directly from its yard. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) has furthered education regarding pet-wildlife conflict by speaking directly to residents, releasing news articles in the local paper and posting safety tips on social media.

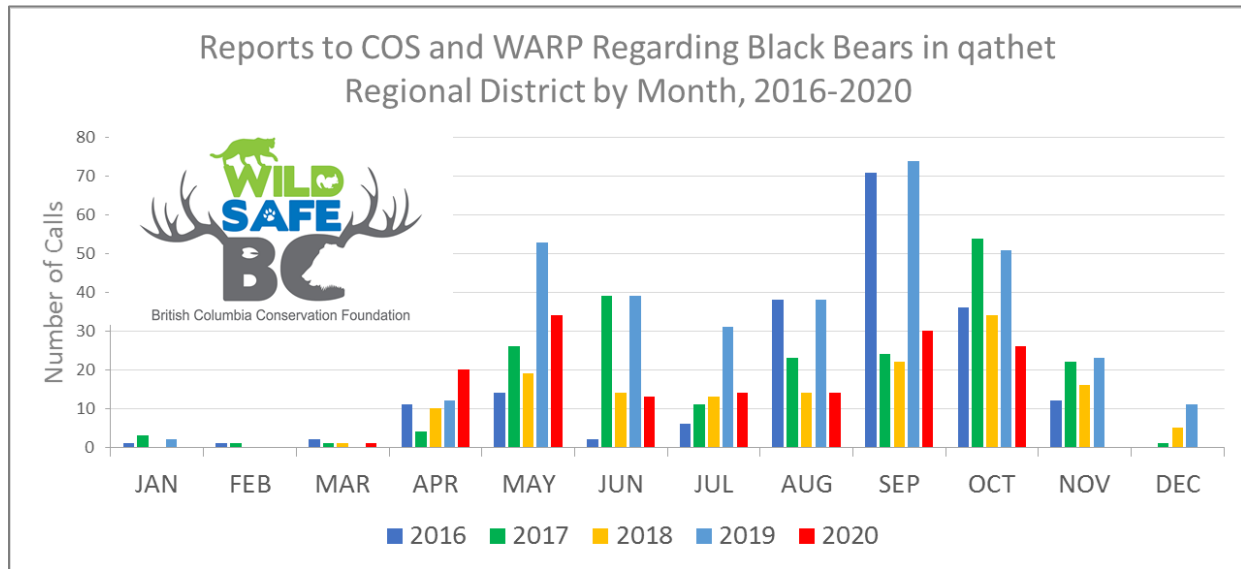


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

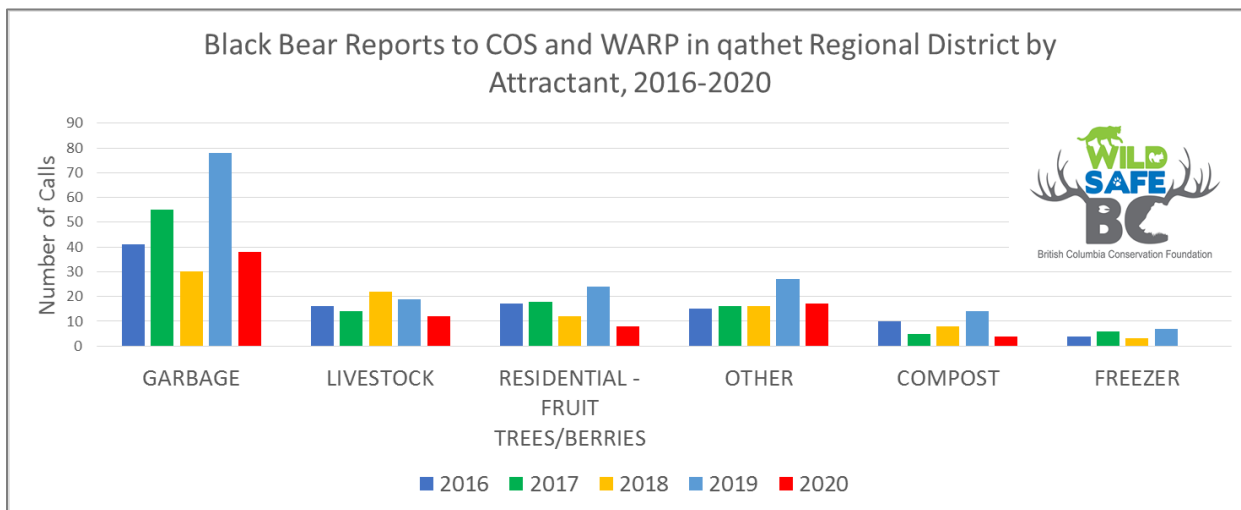


Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding attractants from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020

## 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 groups participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program through webinars and in person presentations that allowed for physical distancing. Over 95 school-aged children became WildSafe Rangers and received kits (Table 1, Figure 5). Due to many children attending school from home this season, these WildSafe Rangers were able to take what they learned and help their parents identify attractants around their homes.

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

School / Group	Grade / Age Group	Students
Edgehill Elementary	Kindergarten	21
Life Cycle Housing	Ages 5-15	15
James Thompson	Grade 7	10
Edgehill Elementary	Grade 1/2	37
Edgehill Elementary	Grade K	15



Figure 5. WildSafe Rangers presentation at Life Cycle Housing, 2020.

## Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC provided two presentations this season (Table 2). At the BC Goes Wild event, there was a bear spray workshop and nature walk in the Millennium Trails (Figure 6). Additionally, a display booth was set up in the back parking lot of the local recreation centre. Along the trails, a volunteer from Tourism Powell River was dressed in a bear suit, the former local mascot Zunga. Zunga was off to the side of the trail and participants were asked to use awareness of their surroundings and the tips learned in the workshop to safely assess the practice bear encounter. Everyone had a lot of fun and photos were taken with Zunga before heading back to the recreation centre.



Figure 6. BC Goes Wild bear spray workshop with nature walk, 2020 Photo Credit: Anji Smith fotos.

The WCC also joined Let's Talk Trash for an online webinar presentation August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 on 'Composting in Bear Country' (Table 2). The presentation was recorded to be viewed by anyone at a later date.

Although the program goes into hibernation in the winter months, there has been discussion of offering a presentation, to TAWS bike garage, in early 2021. TAWS will be offering backcountry safety workshops to the community of cyclists and would like to add wildlife safety. Base Camp Coffee has also expressed interest in wildlife presentations for the spring, after they had joined the WildSafe Business Pledge. In addition, a representative from Coast Mountain Academy has expressed interest in working with WildSafeBC to offer students wildlife safety presentations and spoke of the possibility of students volunteering or becoming trained to offer presentations themselves. Further discussion is to take place early 2021.

Table 2. Community Groups in the qRD that received presentations in 2020.

Organization	Presentation Type	Date	Number of Attendees
Let's Talk Trash	Online Webinar	August 5 <sup>th</sup>	1, recorded for viewing
WSBC BC Goes Wild	Bear Spray Workshop	September 27th	8



## Display Booths

Though large events were cancelled due to the COVID pandemic, the WCC set up display booths at trailheads and local businesses where 173 people were reached (Table 3).

**Table 3. WildSafeBC Information display booths in the qRD for 2020.**

Booth Location	Date	Number of People Reached
<b>Townsite Market</b>	July 3 <sup>rd</sup>	25
<b>Second Beach</b>	June 25 <sup>th</sup>	20
<b>Willingdon Beach</b>	July 23 <sup>rd</sup> / July 30 <sup>th</sup>	74
<b>TAWS bike garage</b>	August 26 <sup>th</sup> / September 8 <sup>th</sup>	34
<b>Powell River Outdoors</b>	September 4 <sup>th</sup>	20

## Door-to-Door Education

Door-to-door education was modified this year to consist of leaving door hangers; the WCC did not knock on doors as has been done in the past. Throughout several of the door-to-door canvassing days, there were residents out in their yards that the WCC was able to speak with directly. The Wildwood, Cranberry, Westview and Willingdon Beach neighborhoods were prioritized for this activity due to high level of wildlife activity and 420 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. In the qRD, the only curbside pick-up is located in the City of Powell River. The City does not currently require garbage to be set out in a container of any type. This is one of the bylaws the WCC is working with the City to amend. At the start of the season, the WCC spoke with the COS and the head of waste management for the City, and it was clear that garbage tagging was an ineffective use of time in our district. The WCC conducted a survey on June 24 and only found one garbage bin left out early. In the qRD, a larger issue is how garbage is stored when it is not on the curb.

In 2018 a green bin program, Community Organics Recovery Exchange (CORE), was put in place. This season, due to COVID-19, the CORE program was paused and the WCC did not receive any reports of these bins as a wildlife attractant. This could become more of an attractant issue in the coming seasons however.

## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC qRD page grew approximately 30% in 2020 from 705 to 915 page followers. Posts regarding more rare wildlife sightings such as grizzlies or cougars had the highest engagement. The WCC submitted several news articles to the Powell River Peak, Powell River Living and the Lund Barnacle about managing attractants and the local BC Goes Wild event. All were well received and generated several phone calls and leads for further education opportunities and workshops. The WCC also had three phone call interviews with radio stations through Vista Radio regarding BC Goes Wild and managing fruit trees.

## Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife in Area signs were placed in areas with high levels of activity as identified by the WARP map and confirmed by the local COS. They were placed strategically where they could be seen and two were placed when required. The signs were left up for approximately one week and then taken down so residents did not get used to them and begin to ignore the signage.

Permanent wildlife signage would be beneficial for high sighting areas around the district. Signage for Millennium Trail system is currently being discussed. Other areas that would benefit from permanent signage are Sunset Park/Scout Mountain Trail in Wildwood, Mowat Bay in Cranberry and Willingdon Beach through to Second Beach in Townsite. The WCC has been in contact with organizations such as the Eldred Valley climbers group and PRPAWS for the Sunshine Coast Trail, who are seeking signage and has supplied them with infographic PDF's to print and laminate.

## Collaborations

Collaborations between WildSafeBC and local businesses and organizations has been very well received this year.

Local businesses and organizations such as Let's Talk Trash, Townsite Market, Tourism Powell River, TAWS bike garage, Powell River Outdoors and PRPAWS collaborated with WildSafeBC in the way of webinars, space for display booths, sharing of social media posts, donations of prizes for the BC Goes Wild event and use of the wildlife landing page template.

The local COS has also been very supportive in answering questions, helping to pinpoint areas that require door-to-door education or signage, and printing out canvassing letters and coloring sheets.

## WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to show initiative 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 (brochures, wildlife signage and a Business Pledge poster) (Figure 7). A total of 10 businesses signed the pledge this year and 12 businesses have expressed interest for next season.



Figure 7. Townsite Fruit & Veg receiving the WildSafe Business Pledge Poster, 2020.

## Special Initiatives

Other initiatives that have been started are: a Bear Smart Working Group; local wildlife landing page for websites; and bylaw amendments regarding Animal Control Bylaw and Waste Management as a wildlife attractant. The Bear Smart Working Group has started to come together for the qRD and hopes to meet in the spring of 2021.

The wildlife landing page has been sent out and accepted by a number of organizations in the community. The WCC will continue to provide this resource and pursue additional organizations to continue to get the WildSafeBC message out to the public.

The City of Powell River Council wants to create some additional regulations to current bylaws, which will all be part of an overall review of the Animal Control Bylaw. This is a great step towards becoming a Bear Smart Community.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Many WildSafeBC outreach activities have been impacted by COVID-19 mitigation measures. However, 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. Door-to-door canvassing throughout the majority of this season was done by simply leaving door hangers with information letters. The WCC did manage to speak directly with some residents when they were out in their yards on canvassing days. The cancellation of local events, closures, or regulation changes to local organizations such as the Farmers Market, made it more difficult to engage with a large number of people during display booths. Display booths were set up at trailheads and local businesses, which saw less foot traffic than an event would offer. This challenge also affected the WildSafe Ranger Program, since schools were not operating as normal. There were still opportunities to present over Zoom webinar and in-person during the month of September when physical distancing was possible.

A consistent challenge in our community is the storage of waste and compost. Currently, the qRD has no bylaw in place on how the waste can be stored and allows for garbage bags to be put out curbside for pick-up without a bin. Initiatives that are recommended for 2021 are: bylaw amendments to address wildlife attractants and the storage of residential waste; education on managing compost and storage of waste; requiring the use of containers when setting garbage out on the curb for collection. The City of Powell River is also looking into the next phase of the CORE program and bylaw amendments should also take these concerns into consideration.

Fruit trees continue to be a main source of attractants, especially throughout Wildwood. Bears have been reported damaging property and remaining in people's yards which impacts the safety of the neighborhood including livestock and pets. To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented or increased in 2021:

- Engaging food banks and other non-profits including gleaning groups
- Electric fencing workshops
- News articles and social media posts focusing on the hazards and solutions of fruit and nut bearing trees as an attractant
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots, speaking directly to residents rather than door hangers

These initiatives will set the qRD on a positive track towards becoming a Bear Smart Community and "keeping wildlife wild and communities safe."

## Acknowledgements

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WildSafeBC qRD is very thankful to have the support of the local Conservation Officers, Andrew Anaka and Gerry Lister, who have provided advice and support in so many ways this season.

Local businesses and organizations helped to make this season possible by promotion, collaboration and support for the program. These included: Let's Talk Trash, Tourism Powell River, PRPAWS, Townsite Market, TAWS bike garage and Powell River Outdoors.

WildSafeBC thanks and recognizes those businesses that adopted the WildSafe Business Pledge: That Chicken Place, Townsite Fruit & Veg, The Rodmay Hotel, The Old Courthouse Inn, Hearth & Grain, Starbucks, Base Camp, The Boardwalk restaurant, Nancy's Bakery, and Westview Motel.

An extra thank you to the volunteers, especially during a pandemic, Danica Duraj (booths and presentations), Jon Nelson (door-to-door preparation and BC Goes Wild event), Anji Smith (photos at BC Goes Wild event), Melanie Anaka (Zunga the bear) and the most heartfelt thank you to Francine Ulmer (past WCC qRD) for all the support and advice throughout this season.