

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

## Alberni Valley

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Cover Photo: View over Sproat Lake from Dog Mountain

## Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Program between May 1st and November 30<sup>th</sup> 2021. The program covers the City of Port Alberni and the surrounding Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) electoral areas of Sproat Lake, Cherry Creek, Beaver Creek and Beaufort which reside on the traditional territory of the Hupačasath and Tseshahat First Nations (Figure 1). In 2021, the most reported animals in order from highest to lowest were black bears, black-tailed deer, and cougars. The most reported attractant for black bears was garbage.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities aiming to prevent conflict with wildlife in the community. Following all BC Public Health Orders and precautions around COVID-19, several of the standard WildSafeBC Program activities were modified to ensure proper sanitization and physical distancing measures were in place. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the season:

- 15 WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) presentations reaching 240 students
- 6 presentations given to community groups to over 75 participants
- 281 people reached through door-to-door outreach, and 399 door hangers left
- There were 8 bin-tagging surveys tagging 169 bins; 87% of the residences whose bins were tagged during the initial survey were not found on the curb again during follow-up surveys
- There were 5 display booths connecting with 250 people
- 50 Facebook posts, increasing the Facebook page following from 117 to 419 (an increase of 258%)
- There were 3 businesses that signed the WildSafe Business Pledge
- A total of 4 campgrounds were contacted regarding the Bare Campsite Program

All this meant over 500 face-to-face conversations with residents that lead to opportunities to deliver WildSafeBC messaging. In addition, this year the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program supported the City of Port Alberni in improving compliance with the Province's Bear Smart Community Program by consulting with parks operators on garbage bins that were leading to human-wildlife conflicts. The WCC also reached out to the Hupačasath, Tseshahat First Nations, and the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council (NTC) for collaboration opportunities, including a possible future partnership with the Haahuupayak school's burgeoning outdoor learning program. Also, the WCC worked with the ACRD to identify bear spray disposal sites and communicated this to the public.

Challenges for 2021 included the City's desire to modify bear-resistant bins to make them more easily accessible for those with mobility issues. Unfortunately, this also has the potential to make them more accessible to bears and can put the community's Bear Smart designation at risk. Education was also paused briefly this season as the community adapted to the new organics collection rollout. The opportunity to establish a human-bear conflict reduction

working group would be a boon to the region as the community continues to work hard to maintain its' Bear Smart Community status.

Working through some of these challenges, and supporting such initiatives would have great impact on our community's ability to keep wildlife wild and our communities safe.

WildSafeBC would like to thank its generous sponsors at the ACRD for making the program possible as well as the local staff, organizations and community residents for their support.

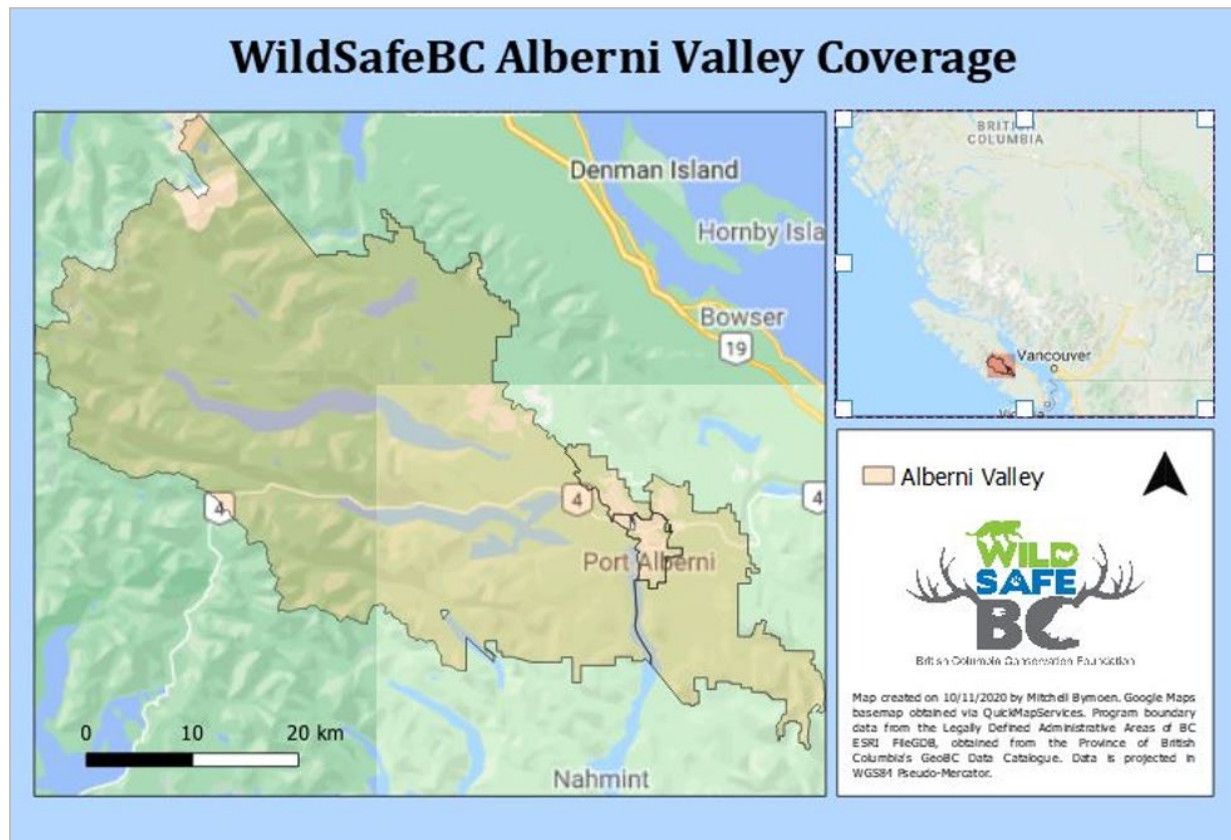


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program coverage area.

## Highlights from the 2021 Season

### Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) or 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 the Alberni Valley includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021. There were 172 black bear reports which is lower than the three-year average of 227 (Figures 2, 3). Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by residential fruit trees and livestock (Figure 4). Cougar activity was also higher than the previous five years, with 73 reports (Figure 5).

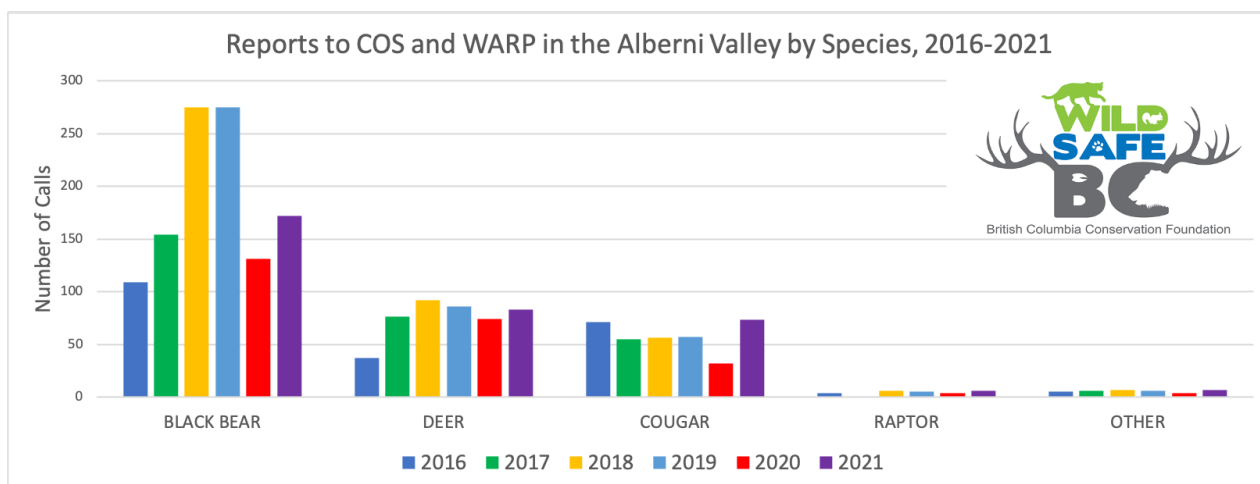


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP by species.

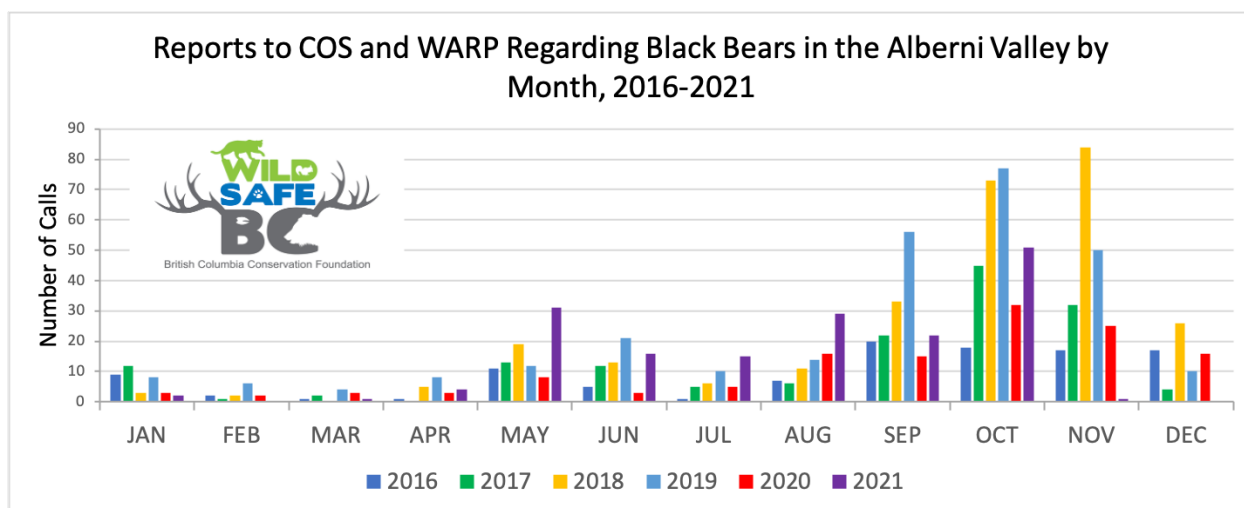


Figure 3. Reports regarding black bears by month.

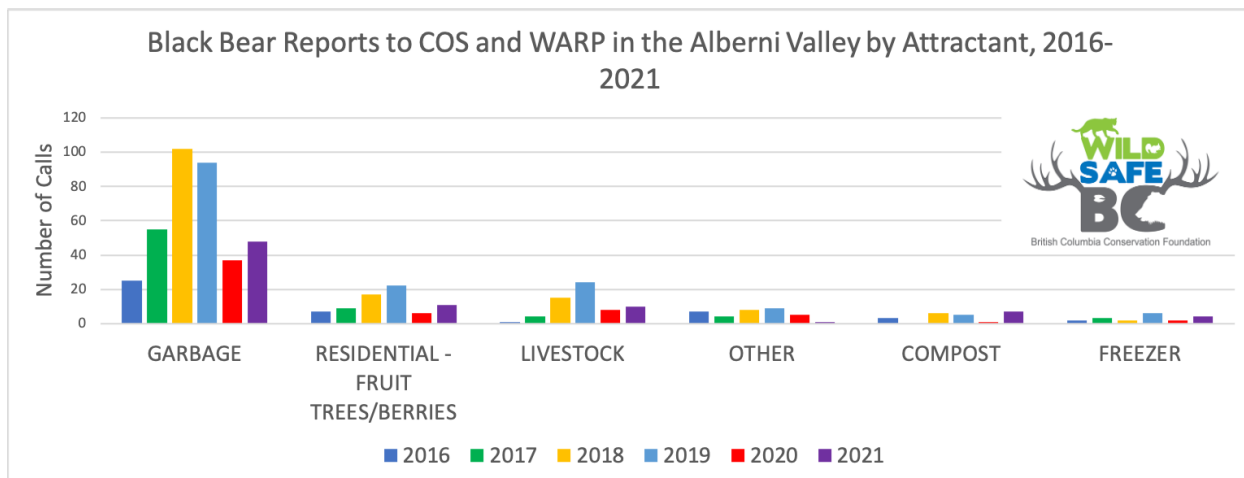


Figure 4. Black bear reports by attractant.

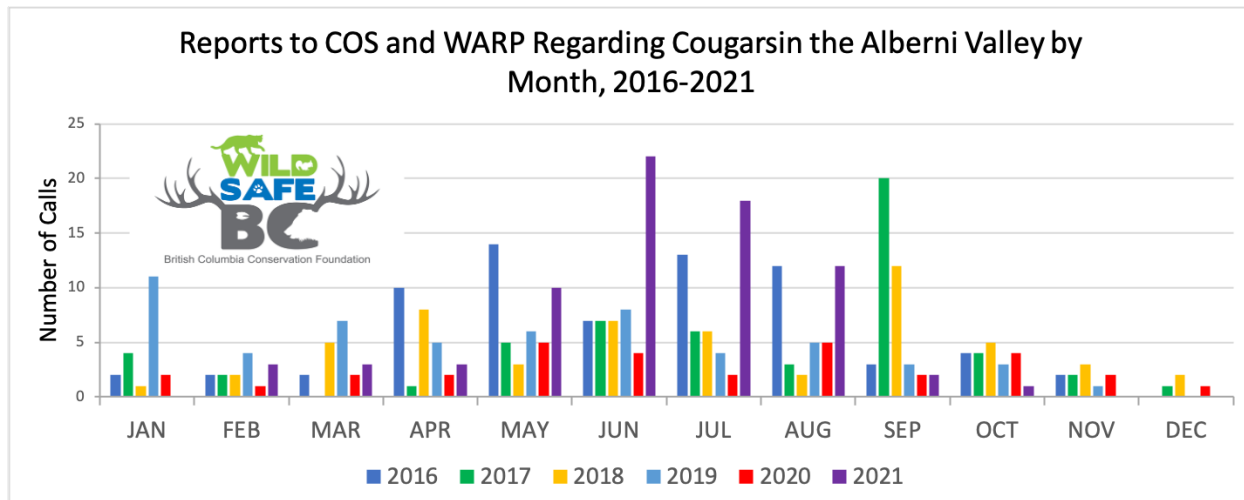


Figure 5. Cougar reports by month, showing high activity in 2021 summer months.

## WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. Three schools participated in the WRP through in-class and outdoor presentations that allowed for physical distancing (Table 1; Figures 6 and 7). Over 550 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits. Of these, 23 students received the extended version which included two visits, an outdoor activity and a take home assignment on attractant management that was reviewed in class.



Table 1. WildSafe Ranger presentations and number of youth that received kits.

School	Grade	Students	Extended
Wood Elementary	3 - 7	173	No
Haahuupayak School	1 - 7	129	No
EJ Dunn	4 & 5	17	No
ADSS	8 & 9	24	No
John Howitt	1 - 7	122	No
Maquinna School	1 – 5	87	Yes

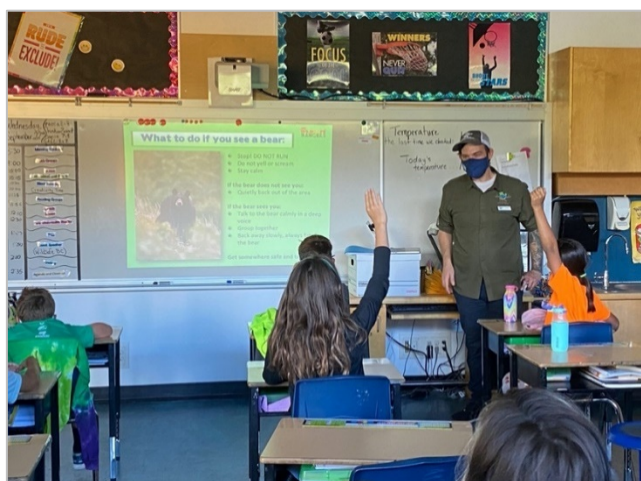


Figure 6. Presenting to students at Haahuupayak School.



Figure 7. WildSafe Ranger Presentation at Wood Elementary.

## Presentations to Community Groups

WildSafeBC can provide a variety of presentations depending on the interest of the group and these include wildlife awareness and safety, bear spray workshops, electric fencing workshops or other subjects falling within the scope of the Program. The WCC gave a total of 6 presentations to over 75 participants (Table 2).

Table 2. Presentations provided in 2021.

Type of Presentation	Location	Participants	Date
<b>Wilderness Safety &amp; Awareness</b>	PA Shelter Society Farm	9	07-07-2021
<b>Bear Spray Workshop</b>	Williamson Park	10	09-25-2021
<b>Electric Fence Workshop</b>	Beaver Creek Community Hall	16	08-13-2021
<b>Program Overview/Attractant Management</b>	Guru Nanak Sikh Society	25	08-15-2021
<b>Bear Spray Workshop</b>	Williamson Park	7	10-17-2021
<b>Program Overview</b>	Rotary Club	12	10-21-2021

## Display Booths

Display booths are an excellent way to reach many people over a short period of time and increase awareness about the Program and its messaging. When events are limited as a result of the pandemic, the WCC set up at popular trailheads. This year the WCC set up 5 display booths during the season, delivering WildSafeBC messaging to over 270 members of the public (Table 3).

Table 3. WildSafeBC booths at trailheads, markets and the Fall Fair.

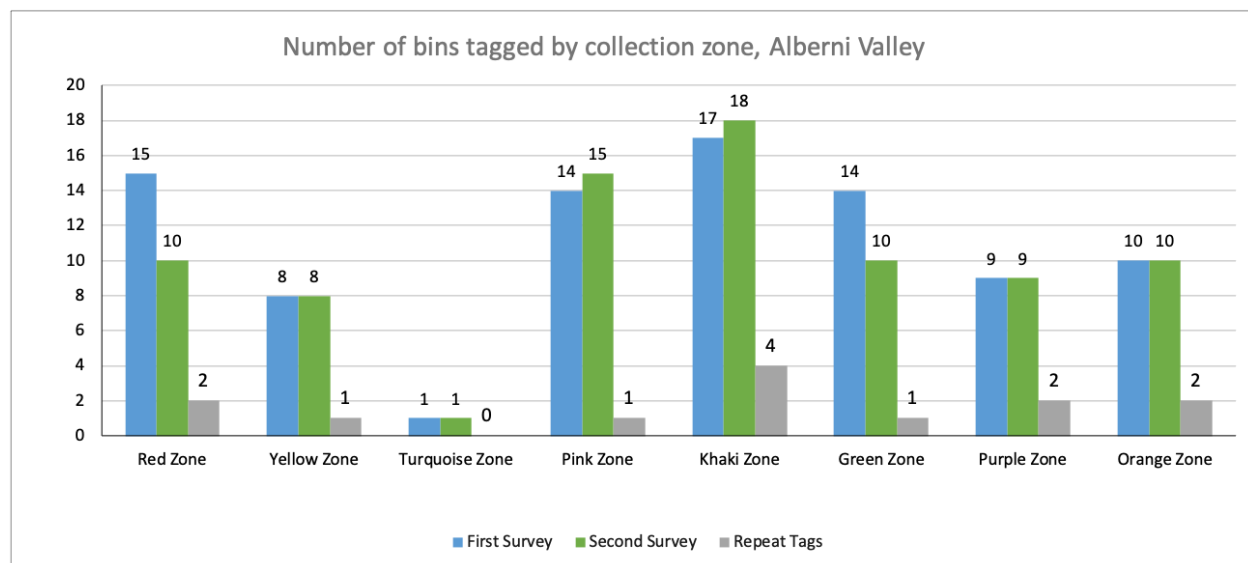
Location	Public Interactions	Date
<b>Spirit Square Market</b>	26	06-26-2021
<b>Burde St. Trailhead</b>	33	07-07-2021
<b>Roger Creek Trailhead</b>	8	07-09-2021
<b>Port Alberni Farmer's Market</b>	36	08-21-2021
<b>Port Alberni Fall Fair</b>	171	09-10,11,12-2021

## Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Through door-to-door education, a total of 281 people were reached during in-person conversations and over 400 people were reached with door hangers. High-conflict neighborhoods were prioritized for this activity, including Golden St., Keeha Lane, and Hilton Ave. areas around cougar activity, and the Compton Rd., upper Gertrude St., and Dunbar St./Gyro Park areas around black bear activity.



Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. During eight surveys, a total of 169 bins were tagged in the City of Port Alberni and 11 bins were tagged more than once. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours is demonstrated by the 87% of residences whose bins were tagged during the initial survey, and then were not found on the curb again during the second survey (Figure 8).



**Figure 8. Results of bin-tagging surveys showing the number of residents that received stickers more than once.**

## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Facebook page grew 258% in 2021 from 117 to 419 page followers. The WCC submitted three articles to the Alberni Valley News about managing attractants that were well received and generated several phone calls and leads for further education opportunities ([Articles linked here](#)). The WCC also worked with the Alberni Valley Gleaning Project to produce a [short video about managing attractants](#) in our yards for the Grow Local program on Shaw Community Link local cable television.

## Wildlife in Area Signs

“Wildlife in Area” signs were placed in hotspot areas during the season where reports indicated a food-conditioned animal or otherwise high-priority conflict was identified. Between May and August, signs primarily addressed repeat cougar sightings in residential neighbourhoods, in particular on Golden St. and surrounding area, Hilton Ave. and surrounding area, Keeha Lane/McKnight St. and surrounding area, Falls St. area, and Ship Creek Rd. August through October brought more black bear activity which demanded signage in the Rogers Creek/Hole in the Wall Trail areas, the Maquinna section of the Log Train Trail, and the area around Southgate Rd. (Figure 9).

## Collaborations

Several collaborations were helpful to advance the program in the region this season. The Alberni Valley Gleaning Project produced the aforementioned video for Grow Local, and was referred to by the WCC for many local residents concerning fruit trees throughout the latter part of the season. This year also brought collaboration opportunities with Port Alberni’s youth recreation programming. Working with the Recreation Services Manager, the WCC identified multiple programs to integrate WildSafe education into programs starting next season.



Figure 9. Bear In Area sign on Roseborough Ave.

## WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to be good examples in their community of 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. There were three businesses signed the pledge this year: Wildflower Bakeshop & Café, Off-Grid Camper Café, and Möbius Books. Numerous others were approached, resulting in leads to pursue early next season.



Figure 10. The WildSafeBC Business Pledge.

## WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

Through the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program, WildSafeBC is able to provide clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. A total of four campgrounds in the region were approached about the program, with some distinct leads into developing the program next spring at multiple campgrounds.

## Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WildSafe Ranger program was delivered to over 120 students at Haahuupayak School this year in collaboration with the Tseshahat administration. Information packages regarding the WildSafeBC program and services were delivered to both the Tseshahat and Hupačasath contacts. Administration at Hahuupayak School also expressed interest in involving WildSafeBC with its burgeoning outdoor education curriculum.

## Special Initiatives

Over the duration of the 2021 program, the WCC worked with Port Alberni parks officials to identify and begin to address garbage bins that are subject to repeated access by wildlife. Discussion with the City is ongoing to support updating the bins in a way that is compliant with the City's Bear Smart Community designation.

A big win for the WCC this year was collaborating with the ACRD and local landfill operators and service contractors to solidify a practice for disposing emptied bear spray canisters. Residents can now take empty canisters to either the Alberni Valley Landfill or West Coast Landfill to dispose canisters in the metals bins. To responsibly dispose of bear spray, empty the contents in a place away from people. Once discharged, the smell of bear spray may attract animals.

In August, an electric fence workshop was organized by the WCC and presented by the WildSafeBC Program Manager to promote electric fence knowledge and the cost-share program. The workshop saw a healthy turnout with much interest from the community. While the cost-share program has so far been accessed by one resident, the foundations for the program were laid this season, and greater interest in the cost-share is expected for next season.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Garbage is the most significant attractant for black bears in the Alberni Valley. Bin tagging education initiatives are highly successful at changing behaviours, but illegal household dumping and other abuse of community garbage containers continues to attract wildlife.

Fruit trees continue to be the second-most reported attractant in the region, drawing wildlife into residential areas. Bears have been reported damaging fences and remaining in people's yards which impacts neighbourhood safety. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community; these areas could benefit from increased education and fruit gleaning activities, and bylaw enforcement where necessary.

To address the improperly managed solid waste and residential fruit trees in the region, the following initiatives should be taken going forward:

- Increased electric fence education and continue to develop and promote cost-share program
- Strengthened bylaws with regards to small urban livestock and beehives that require electric fencing
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, regional mail-outs.
- Further collaboration with the Alberni Valley Gleaning Project (which dissolved earlier than anticipated this year due to volunteer shortage)
- Connect residents through a social media-based food sharing group
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots
- Review bylaw enforcement strategies for fruit tree infractions found in Port Alberni Bylaw 5030 Section 11.1 (r)

Ideally, WildSafeBC messaging can be included on both the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District and City of Port Alberni websites to make the regional messaging around human-wildlife conflict reduction and the Bear Smart program more coherent.

Another opportunity presents in the pursuit of consistent bear-resistant infrastructure in Port Alberni parks and other public spaces. With the City's rapid development and influx of new residents, it is undergoing a kind of renaissance. Considering Port Alberni's Bear Smart Community designation is up for renewal in 2023, this is an opportune time for the city to review its Bear Smart Community commitments, and establish itself as a progressive and safe community that values stewardship of its local wildlife and environment.

Most of the above concerns and suggestions would ideally be addressed by a diverse human-bear conflict working group which could help navigate competing priorities. This season the WCC created preliminary plans for a working group, but this would be a worthwhile undertaking for local governments and other groups to direct resources towards.

## Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank Jenny Brunn, Jodie Frank, Brenda Sauve, Paulo Eichelberger, Amy Wilson, and the administrative staff at the ACRD for their integral assistance in delivering the program this year. I would also like to thank Conservation Officers Andrew Riddell and Mallory Blake, Port Alberni Bylaw Officer Nathan Bouelle, and the BCCF team. Special thanks are extended to The City of Port Alberni, Shaw Connect, Alberni Valley News and 93.3 The Peak for helping to promote program events.