

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

Central Okanagan

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the activities of the WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Program between May 1st and November 30th, 2021. This WildSafeBC program area includes the member municipalities in the Regional District of the Central Okanagan (RDCO), as well as the Central Okanagan West and East Electoral Areas (Figure 1). We acknowledge this land as the unceded traditional territories of the syilx/Okanagan peoples.

This year, deer were the most reported species to the Conservation Officer Service in the Central Okanagan, with a total of 831 reports (Jan 1-Nov 20, 2021), followed by black bears with 695 reports. Both deer and black bear reports are higher than average this year, with deer reports 1.5 times the average compared to the previous five years, and black bear reports 1.4 times the average. The majority of deer reports (67%) are from the City of Kelowna, while the West Kelowna and Westbank First Nation area had the largest proportion of black bear reports (50%).

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. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the season:

- eight WRP presentations and 180 youth reached
- two bear spray presentations given to RDCO staff and 25 participants
- 18 households reached through DTD in person and 254 door hangers left
- eight bin tagging routes and 245 bins tagged; 72% of the residences whose bins were tagged during the initial survey and then were not found on the curb again during the second survey
- three display booths and over 250 people reached
- Over 85 Facebook posts (excluding posts shared from Provincial page) and 189 new Facebook page followers from January 1 to October 27, 2021

The WCC worked with the RDCO Waste Reduction Office to develop bear-in-area signage for the communities of Kelowna and Lake Country, which did not previously have any signage. The WCC facilitated the creation of WildSafeBC Guide to Safer Deer Fencing and supported a strata community looking at making changes to their currently high-risk fence for deer. The WCC also supported the RDCO Waste Reduction Office on their bear-resistant garbage bin pilot project, with the end goal of these bins being more widely available to residents.

Thank you to the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the Regional District of Central Okanagan for funding and supporting the program. The WCC sincerely appreciates the commitment of program volunteers and collaborators. A notable challenge contributing to human-bear conflicts in the area is awareness of bear conflicts and how to prevent them, especially in relation to attractant management and garbage. To address this, the WCC will continue WildSafeBC outreach activities and supporting both the program sponsor and Regional District member municipalities in implementing Bear Smart criteria. Moving forward, these initiatives and partnerships will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

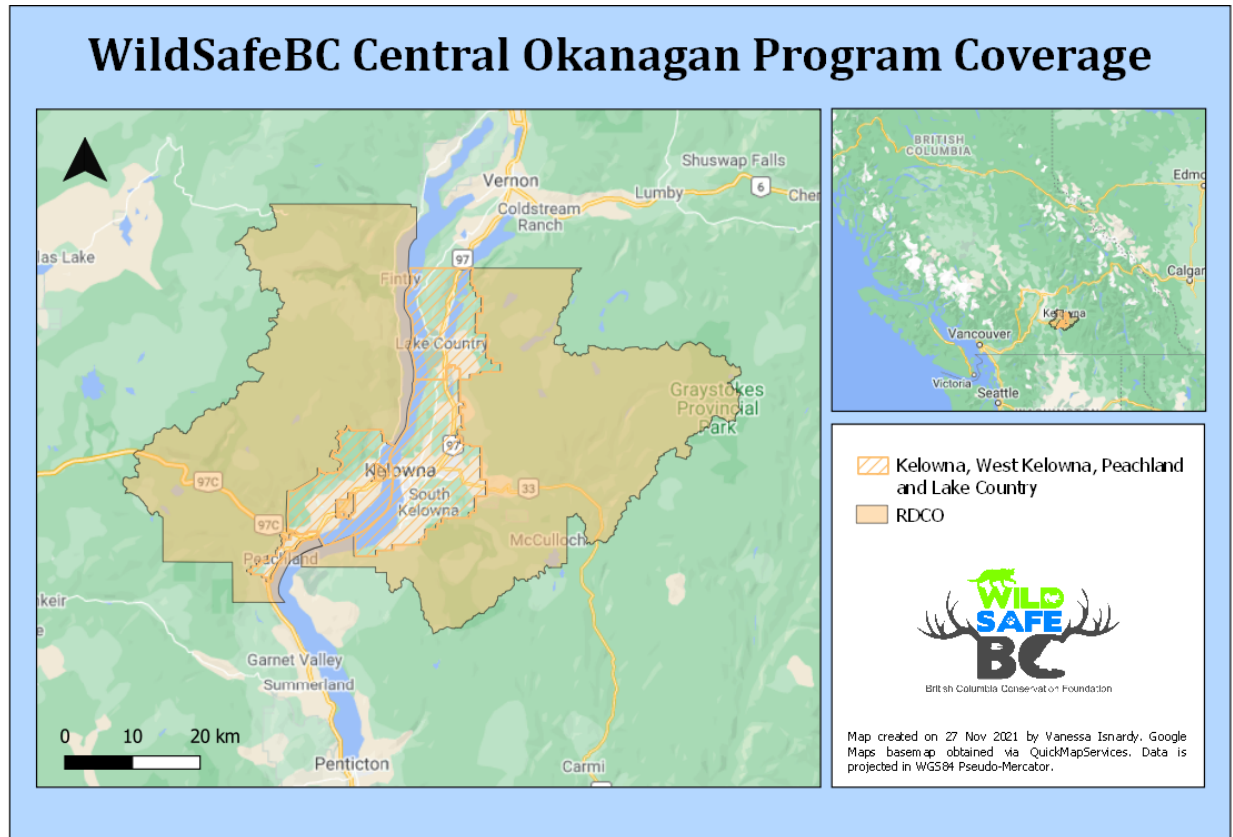


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Central Okanagan program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: Meg Bjordal, WildSafeBC Community Coordinator doing bin tagging work.

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 Central Okanagan includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 20, 2021. In 2021 deer were the most reported species with 831 reports, followed by black bears with 695 reports (Figure 2). Coyotes and cougars were the distant third and fourth reported species, with similar numbers, 86 and 80 reports respectively (Figure 2). Moose were the fifth most commonly reported species in 2021, with only 23 reports (Figure 2).

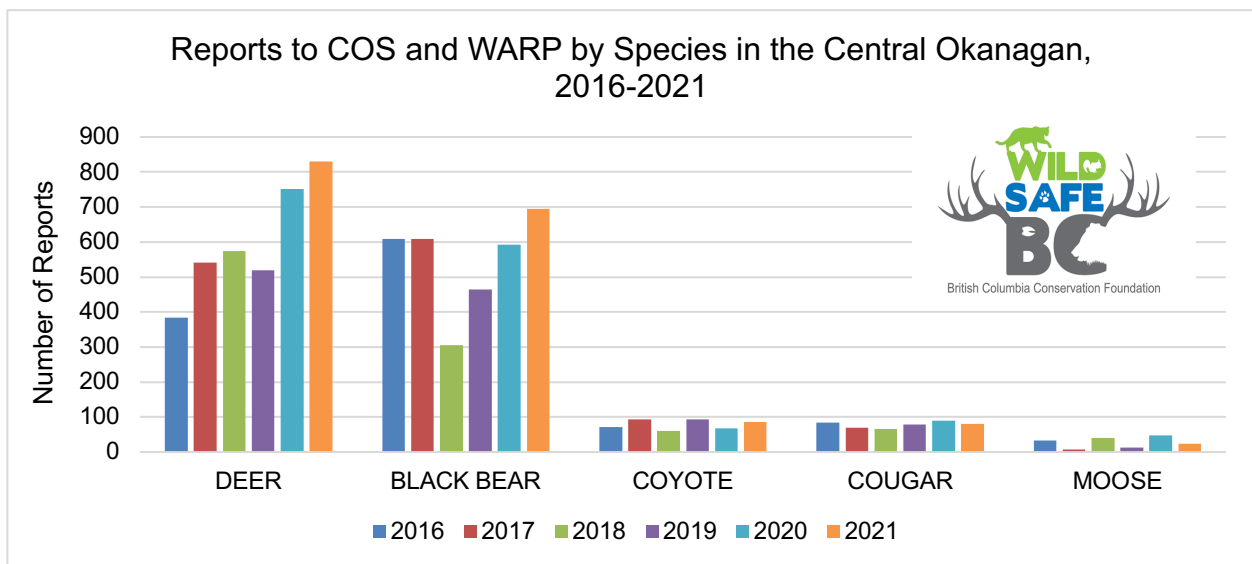


Figure 2. Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) by the five top most reported species from January 1, 2016 to November 20, 2021.

The last two years have seen a high increase in deer reports, with this year having the highest number of reports in the last six years (Figure 2). The number of deer reports in 2021 is 1.5 times the annual average of 554 reports from 2016-2020. Human-deer conflicts can include damage to residential gardens, vehicle collisions, and encounters with aggressive or defensive deer, particularly during fawning season and when people have dogs with them. The vast majority of deer reports made this year (84%) are regarding injured/distressed or dead deer. Major risks to deer in urban areas include vehicle collisions and impalement or entanglement on fencing. Also notable is that 67% of the 2021 deer reports in the Central Okanagan are attributed to the City of Kelowna (Figure 3).

Coyote and cougar reports have remained relatively consistent over the last six years in the region, with an average of 79 and 78 reports respectively (Figure 2).

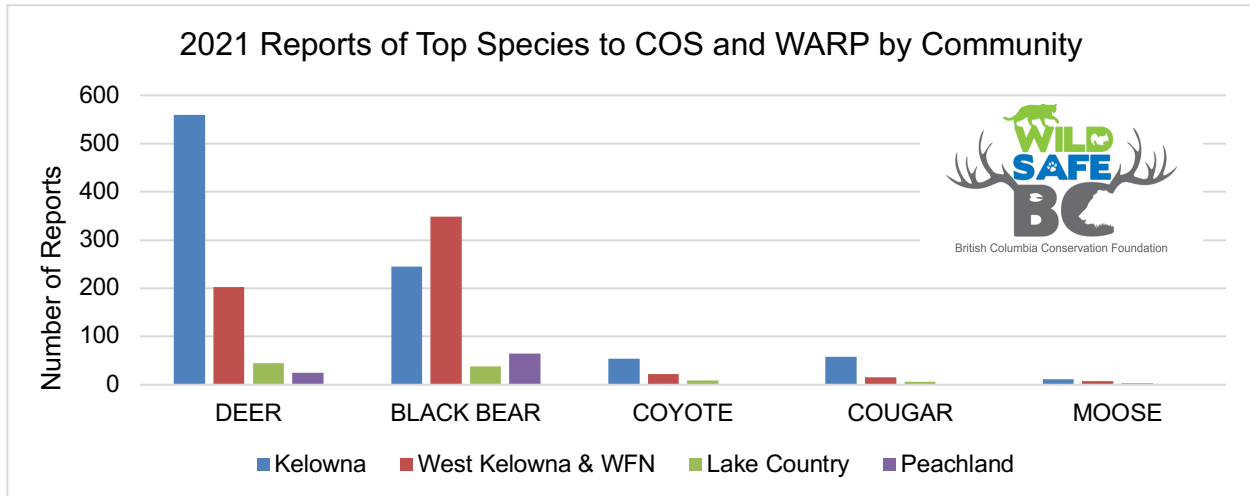


Figure 3. Reports of the top five wildlife species to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) by Central Okanagan Community from January 1 – November 20, 2021. Due to the way the data is recorded, the Central Okanagan East Electoral Area is grouped with Kelowna; and similarly West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation (WFN) and the Central Okanagan West Electoral Area are displayed together.

Black bear reports are also up this year (Figure 2), with 1.4 times the annual average of 516 reports from 2016-2020. The West Kelowna and Westbank First Nation areas have the largest proportion of black bear reports (Figure 3), with 50% of the overall reports in the Central Okanagan. The increase in black bear reports this year, particularly on the westside, is likely due to a combination of drought conditions that reduced natural food availability and nearby wildfires that resulted in bears needing to move to adjacent habitats. This theory is supported by the higher than usual amount of black reports made during August, September and October (Figure 4) when pressure for food resources is highest for bears.

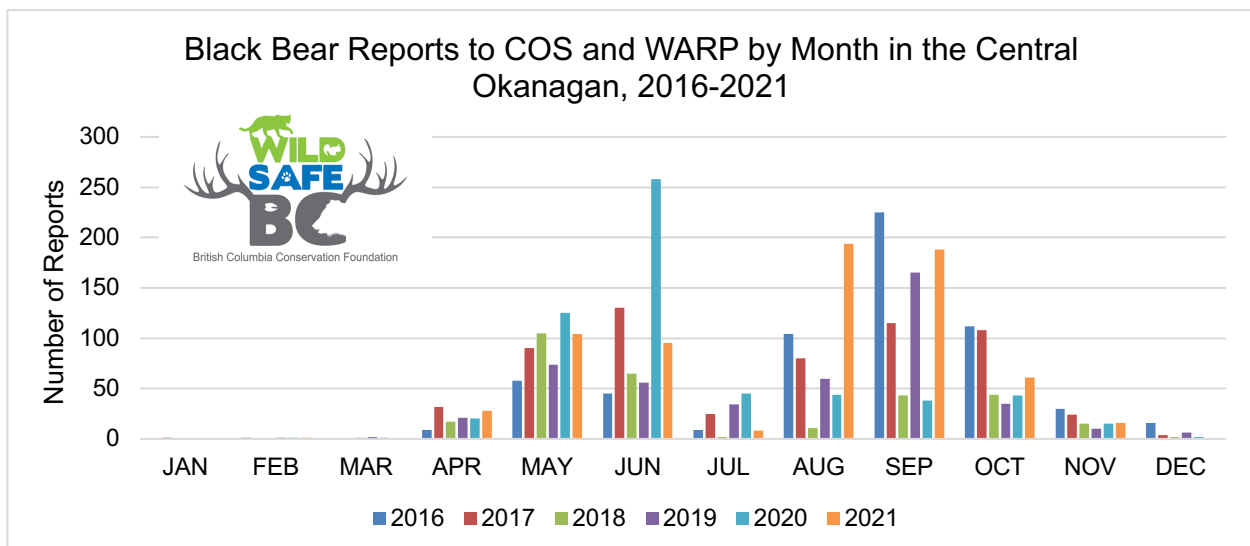


Figure 4. Black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) in the Central Okanagan by month from January 1 – November 20, 2021.

Human-bear conflicts typically arise from accessibility of non-natural food sources which attract bears. When non-natural foods are readily available in an urban area, this can result in bears remaining in and around the community, rather than moving on or through. As such, removing access to non-natural foods is essential in order to prevent conflicts with bears. In 2021, garbage was identified in over half of the black bear reports in which attractants were noted (Figure 5).

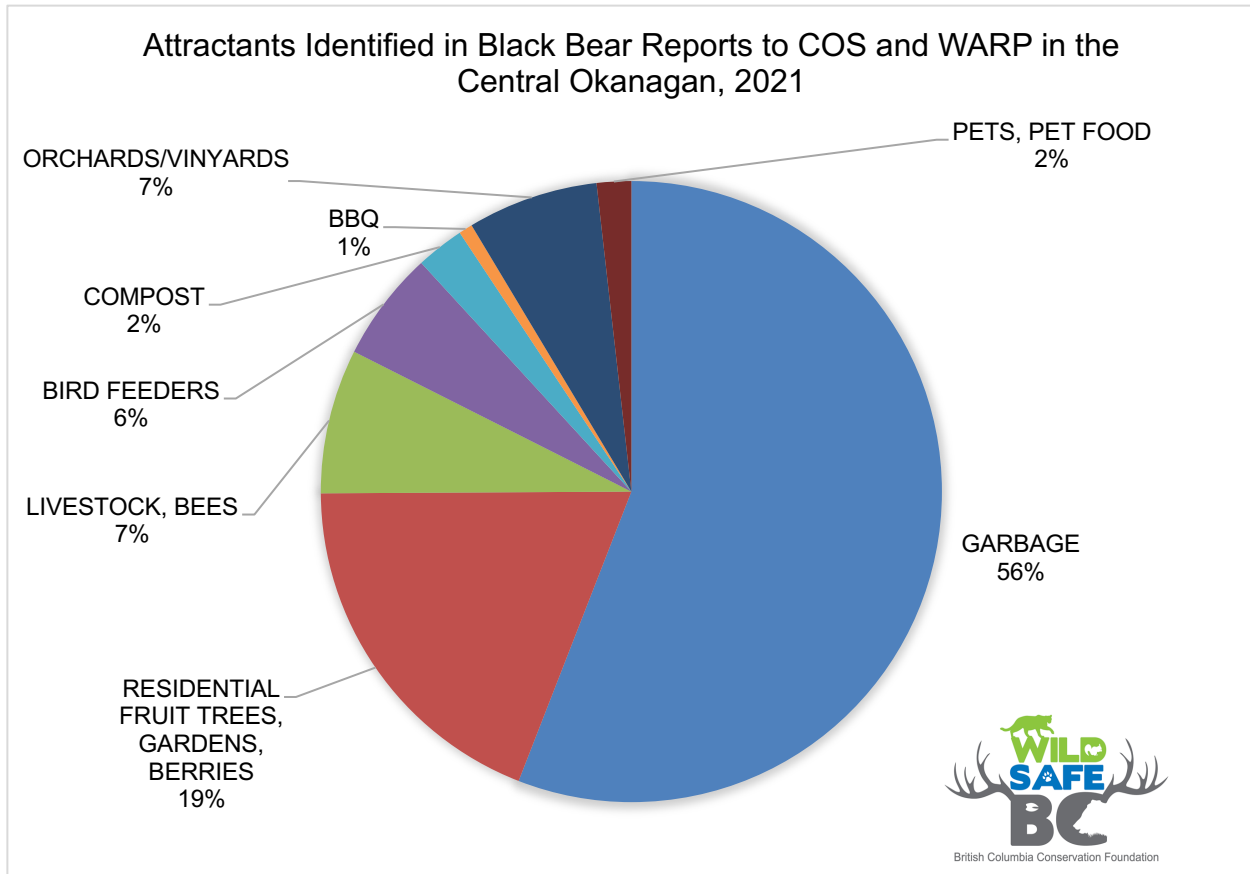


Figure 5. Attractants and their relative proportions identified in black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) in the Central Okanagan from January 1 – November 20, 2021.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of three schools participated in the WRP through webinars and outdoor presentations that allowed for physical distancing. This season 180 students became WildSafe Rangers (Table 1) and received at least partial WildSafe Ranger kits with activity sheets, tattoos, bookmarks and brochures. Keeping with the special focus on waste management for the WildSafeBC Central Okanagan program, the 50 students at Canyon Falls Middle School

completed an attractant management assessment of a nearby neighbourhood, and received a related take-home assignment to complete on their street.

Table 1. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2021.

School	Grade	Students
Canyon Falls Middle School	6 and 7	50
Davidson Road Elementary	2 and 3	61
South Kelowna Elementary	K, 3 and 4	69

Presentations

The WCC presented two bear spray workshops to a total of 25 Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) staff members (Figure 6), as part of a certification for level two Wildlife Awareness and Safety Training. The bear spray workshops demonstrated safe use and effective deployment of bear spray, and provided an opportunity for participants to practice using inert spray.



Figure 6. Bear spray workshop with RDCO staff.

Display Booths

The WCC partnered with the RDCO Parks Department to attend three of their events this season with the WildSafeBC information booth (Table 2; Figure 7). The WildSafeBC booth is

popular with kids and adults alike, and a great opportunity for the WCC to engage with the public. Over 250 people were reached through these events during the 2021 season.

Table 2. Events attended with the WildSafeBC booth in 2021.

Event	Park	Reach	Date
Parks Day	Bertram Regional Park	72	July 17
Perseids Meteor Shower	Kopje Regional Park	40	Aug 12
Kikinee Ambassador Day	Mission Creek Regional Park	140	Sept 11



Figure 7. WildSafeBC booth at the 2021 Perseids Meteor Shower event at Kopje Regional Park.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

In light of COVID-19, door-to-door education was modified this year to largely consist of leaving door hangers and letters speaking to the human-wildlife conflict occurring in neighbourhoods. Through door-to-door education, 254 households were reached with door hangers, and over 18

houses were further reached during in-person conversations. The following areas were prioritized as a result of high wildlife activity:

- Kelowna:
 - Southeast Kelowna
 - Tower Ranch
 - Upper Mission
- West Kelowna:
 - Lakeview Heights
- District of Lake Country:
 - The Lakes
- Central Okanagan West Electoral Area:
 - Westshore Estates
- Central Okanagan East Electoral Area:
 - Ellison

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. It is an important activity to draw attention to garbage being a wildlife attractant, and encourage residents to wait until the morning of collection day to place out. As this was the first season for this program, efforts were made to reach as many different areas as possible, which resulted in eight distinct routes (Figure 8). A total of 245 bins were tagged as part of the Central Okanagan program this season. For the two routes repeated, six received education stickers more than once in southeast Kelowna, and ten in Okanagan Center, which is 24% and 31% respectively of bins tagged during the first pass. Therefore, despite the same number of bins tagged on the second pass in southeast Kelowna, and an increase during the second Okanagan Center pass (Figure 8), this indicates that the bin tagging efforts do result in positive behaviour changes.

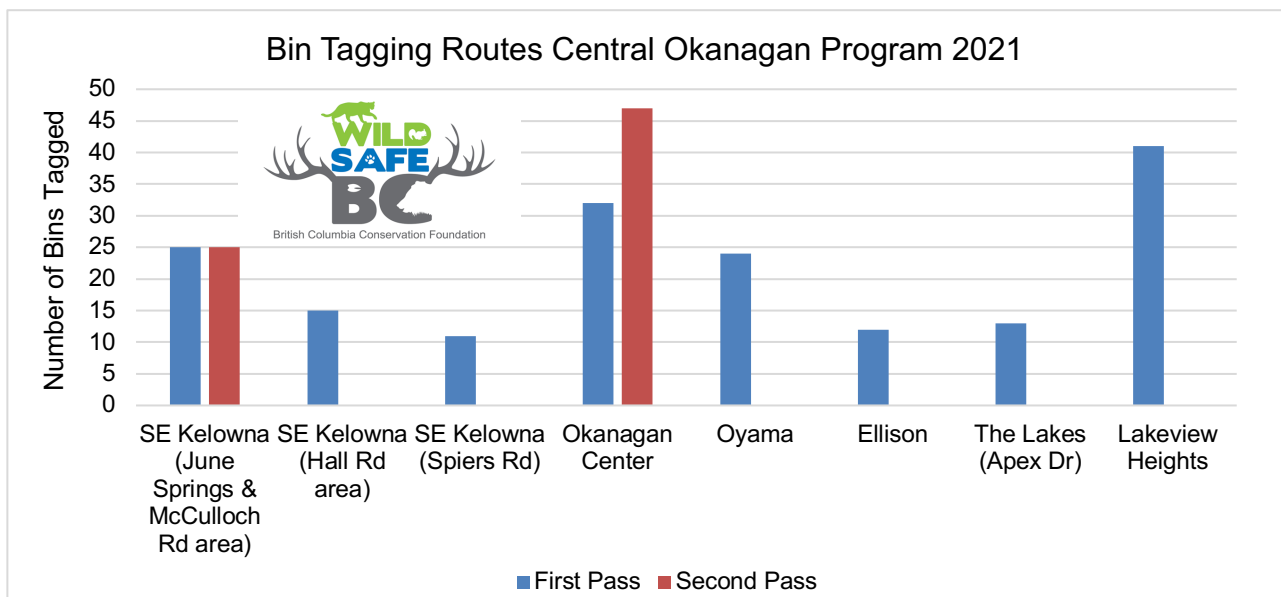


Figure 8. Bin tagging routes for the WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Program in 2021.

An interesting observation made while bin tagging, was a bear-resistant cart in southeast Kelowna that was placed out early for collection and unclipped (Figure 9). Unclipped, these carts are not bear-resistant. This highlights the need to ensure that when bear-resistant carts are made more widely available to residents, if a model that requires locking or clipping by the resident is selected, then bylaws and education around proper use of these bins will be required alongside their rollout. Alternatively consideration of carts with gravity locking mechanisms would likely help prevent this problem.



Figure 9. Bear-resistant cart unclipped at the curb, the night before collection.

Social Media and Press

Management of the Central Okanagan Facebook page was shared with the Okanagan Westside program, and as such the page name was changed to “WildSafeBC Central Okanagan”. The page grew 32% in 2021 from 583 to 772 page followers by the end of October. The page had an excellent reach of over 40,000 people with more than 85 original posts created. The posts with the highest reach were the ones alerting residents to wildlife in neighbourhoods. Wherever applicable, the WCC worked with communications staff from member municipalities, including the District of Lake Country and the City of West Kelowna, as well as the RDCO, to share posts, which greatly helped to increase post reach.

Monitoring of community Facebook pages for neighbourhoods within the program area provided valuable insight on wildlife activity within the neighbourhoods, as activity would often be reported there and not to the COS. Pictures and videos of bears posted to social media also assisted to provide valuable information about the bears in the community including location, behaviours and number of individuals. These community pages were also good locations to

share posts from the Central Okanagan page to reach more people, and provided an opportunity to address situations in specific neighbourhoods when necessary.

The WCC was interviewed for several traditional print, online, radio and television news stories (Appendix, Table 3). These stories raised awareness of the challenges with human-wildlife conflict in the area, especially the unusually high amount of bear activity that occurred this fall. They were also an excellent tool to deliver information on attractant management and the importance of it, to a large number of people. Additionally, the WCC reviewed and provided input on three media releases put out by the RDCO relating to bears.

Wildlife in Area Signs

With this being the first season for the Central Okanagan program, and in particular WildSafeBC program coverage for the District of Lake Country and the City of Kelowna, groundwork was laid for bear-in-area signage for Lake Country and Kelowna. The RDCO Waste Reduction Office graciously provided funding for printing, and helped facilitate contacts and communications with Lake Country and Kelowna staff. WildSafeBC proposed and designed the signage, facilitated printing, and developed a deployment protocol. The protocol established requires collaboration between the WCC who requests sign placements based on bear activity, and municipal staff who install the signs. Moving forward, these signs (Figure 10) will be an important tool for resident awareness and education relating to urban bear activity.



Figure 10. Bear-in-Area signage developed for Lake Country and Kelowna.

Collaborations

With concerns raised by both the public and COS over unsafe fencing for deer, the WCC helped facilitate creation of a WildSafeBC Guide on Safer Deer Fencing, made by the WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator. This guide was then used as a handout at events, by local COS, and as a resource for concerned public. The WCC also supported a concerned resident who belonged to a strata community that was surrounded by both picketed and double top rail fencing, which presents both an impalement and entanglement hazard to deer. After a site visit, the WCC provided brochures and the guide to assist with educating the other residents, and comments and suggestions on changes needed to bring forward to the strata council.

Special Initiatives

The WCC worked with the RDCO Waste Reduction Office to provide advice and support their bear-resistant garbage bin pilot project, with the end goal of these bins being more widely available to residents. Discussions also occurred about attractant management bylaws. Both bylaws and bear-resistant bins are essential components to reducing human-bear conflicts in the area, and fit into the Provinces' [Bear Smart Community criteria](#) framework. This framework is effective in reducing human-bear conflicts as it addresses the root causes. The WCC supports and encourages all RDCO member municipalities to work on Bear Smart initiatives.

Challenges and Opportunities

As was anticipated at the start of the season, with this being a new program a large challenge in the Central Okanagan program area is a varying degree of awareness and education by the public on human-bear conflicts. Some neighbourhoods with high bear conflict have good neighbour-neighbour education which assists to achieve a high degree of good attractant management practices, while other areas, awareness and/or compliance is low. This was less significant where there was overlap with the Okanagan Westside program, which is in its sixth year, so programming for the Central Okanagan program focused around Kelowna and Lake Country this season. To continue addressing this, as well as challenges around garbage being the number one reported bear attractant, renewal of this WildSafeBC program is key.

Continuation of core WildSafeBC activities, such as door-to-door-education, bin tagging, and use of media are essential for increasing public awareness and compliance around attractant management.

A related challenge is the underreporting of bear activity in the community to the COS RAPP line. Residents may be unaware of where or how to report, or even reluctant due to concerns over bears being destroyed if they report them. However, early reporting, when a bear is initially sighted in a residential area is important as it assists both the WCC and Conservation Officers to know where the potential for conflict exists and to be able to work proactively, rather than reactively. On several occasions the WCC was contacted either directly or indirectly (via program sponsors or other collaborators) by members of the public after conflict situations had developed. These reports often described frustrating situations, with regular bear visits and sometimes public safety concerns, yet there would be no official reports from the area. The

WCC worked hard through various outreach activities this season to explain why reporting is important. The WCC should continue working on addressing this next season, and utilizing partnerships with RDCO and member municipalities to assist with public education on this matter to move more towards being able to proactively prevent human-bear conflicts.

Acknowledgements

The WCC is grateful for the generous support the WildSafeBC Central Okanagan program receives from its funders including the British Columbia Conservation Foundation and the Regional District of Central Okanagan. Thank you to RDCO staff, Rae Stewart, Cynthia Coates and Bruce Smith for their program support and information sharing. The WCC is also very appreciative of the assistance from fellow WildSafeBC Columbia Shuswap Coordinator, Julia Helland for her time and expertise lent to the Central Okanagan program.

Thank you to Conservation Officers Murdock, Owens, and Seitz, as well as COS Sergeants Hanratty and Myroniuk for their communications and collaboration. The WCC also thanks the BCCF team for their guidance and help throughout the season. Finally, a special thanks goes out to events volunteer Ann Graham, and door-door volunteer Debbie Bryan.

Appendix

Table 3. Media stories with information from the WCC and Central Okanagan program in 2021.

Date	Media Outlet	Type	Title or Topic (click link to read full article)
April 23	Castanet	news article	Turtle nappers not welcome
April 29	Info News	news article	Central Okanagan bear-resistant garbage bins project wrapping up soon
April 28	Kelowna Capitol News	news article	WildSafeBC expands service into Kelowna, Lake Country
May 17	Kelowna Capitol News	news article	WildSafeBC reminds residents to manage attractants as bears spotted in Okanagan
May 20	AM1150	radio	Bear activity & new Central Okanagan program
June 2	AM1150	radio	Fawn season & pet safety to prevent wildlife conflict
June 29	AM1150	radio	Effects to wildlife from fires
Aug 23	K96-3	radio	Increase in bear activity in town from fires and drought
Aug 23	CBC	radio	Increase in bear activity in town from fires and drought
Aug 29	Info News	news article	Kamloops RCMP asking residents to be aware after two bears spotted in town
Aug 29	CHBC Global	TV	Bear activity
Sept 14	CHBC Global	TV	Bear sightings on the rise in Central Okanagan
Sept 17	Kelowna Now	news article	Numerous bear sightings calls for increased garbage management
Oct 13	Pattison Media	radio, news article	Bear activity
Nov 2	AM1150	radio	Cougar safety & conflict reduction
Dec 1	CBC	radio	Bears still active in urban areas