

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

Cowichan Valley

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Executive Summary

In 2021, the WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley program entered its fifth year. WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley acknowledges that it operates on the unceded traditional territories of the Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Malahat First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, and Stz'uminus First Nation. This report describes the activities of WildSafeBC in the Cowichan Valley from April 15 to November 30, 2021. As a large geographical region (Figure 1), education through door-to-door activities, presentations, and information tables were focused on hotspot areas of bear conflict. Black bears attracted to garbage generated the highest number of calls to the BC Conservation Officer Service (COS) in the Cowichan Valley.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), Amanda Crowston, 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 WCC gave 11 presentations to 195 people, reached 817 households through door-to-door and garbage tagging efforts, spoke with 225 people at 2 events across the Cowichan Valley, and had 214 views on the YouTube presentation of Wildlife Awareness and Safety. On social media, the WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley Facebook page following increased by 39% and now has 777 followers.

WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley would not be possible without the support of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), Town of Ladysmith, Municipality of North Cowichan (MNC), Town of Lake Cowichan, the Province of British Columbia, and British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Looking towards 2022, the main goal is to educate the general public across the Cowichan Valley about wildlife safety and to change perception of what human-wildlife conflict is and how to minimize conflict. This education can be accomplished by reaching more people through the WildSafe Ranger Program, community events, online presentations, and door-to-door activities. Through education, collaboration and community solutions, we can keep wildlife wild and communities safe.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley program coverage area.

Cover Photo: Learning about wildlife at the Quw'utsun Rivers Day, September 25, 2021.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2021 Season	4
Wildlife Activity	4
WildSafe Ranger Program.....	6
Presentations to Community Groups	7
Display Booths	8
Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging	10
Social Media and Press	12
Challenges and Opportunities	12
Acknowledgements	14

Table of Figures

Figure 1. WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley program coverage area.....	2
Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP in the Cowichan Valley from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021.	4
Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP by species from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021.....	4
Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021.	5
Figure 5. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP by attractant from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021.	5
Table 1. Cowichan Valley Areas	6
Figure 6. Reports to the COS and WARP by area in the Cowichan Valley from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021.....	6
Table 2. Schools and groups that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2021.....	7
Table 3. WildSafeBC Presentations in the Cowichan Valley in 2021.....	7
Figure 7. Wildlife Awareness & Safety presentation posted on YouTube, 2021.....	7
Figure 8. Demonstration of setting up a temporary electric fence, August 17, 2021.	8
Table 4. WildSafeBC information booths in the Cowichan Valley in 2021.....	8
Figure 9. The WildSafeBC booth at Quw'utsun Rivers Day, September 25, 2021.	9
Figure 10. Comparing hands to a black bear paw, Quw'utsun Rivers Day, September 25, 2021.	9
Table 5. Door-to-door education in the Cowichan Valley in 2021.	10
Figure 11. The WCC door-to-door canvassing (left) and garbage appears to have been dragged between houses (right), Lake Cowichan, 2021.....	10
Figure 12. Bins placed at the curb the night before collection received a tag, Cowichan Valley, 2021.....	11
Table 6. Areas that received garbage tagging in the Cowichan Valley in 2021.....	11
Figure 13. Number of bins placed out early for collection before and after education activities in the Cowichan Valley, 2021.....	12

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). There were a total of 656 wildlife reports for the Cowichan Valley from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021 (Figure 2).

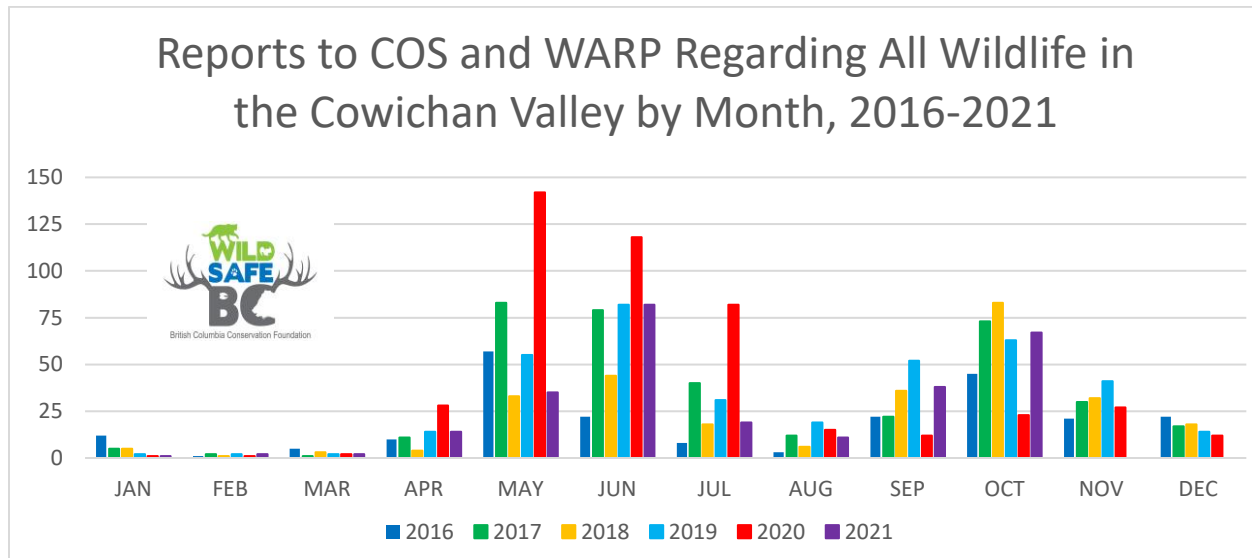


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP in the Cowichan Valley from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021.

The number of black bear calls (271) was below the average of the previous five years (345 reports) (Figures 3 and 4). Deer and elk reports were slightly higher than the five year average, while cougar and other wildlife reports remained consistent with previous years. Other wildlife calls include raptors, wolves, and non-specified animals (Figure 3).

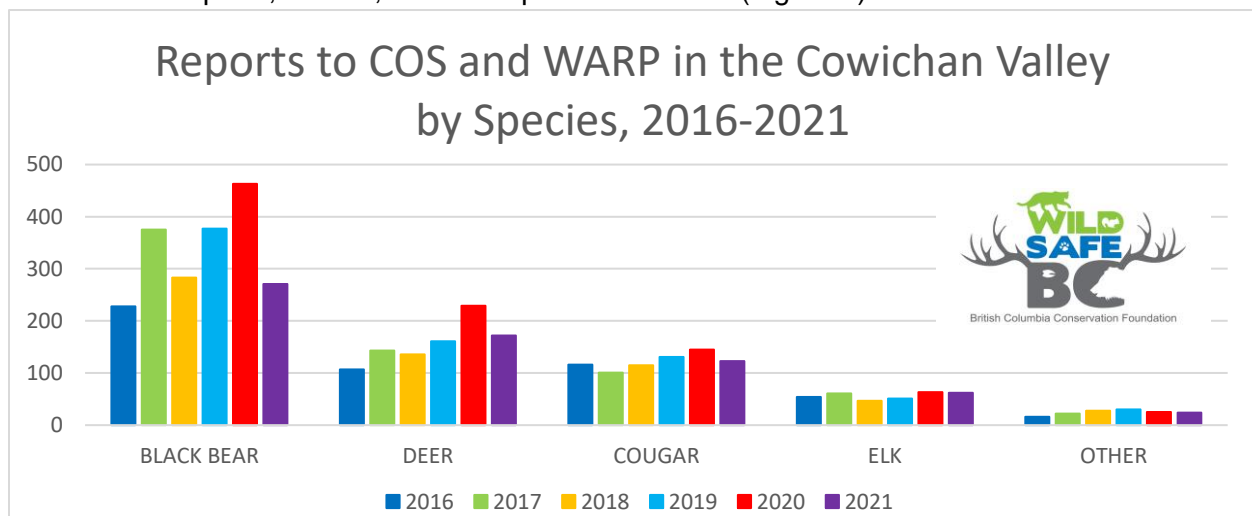


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP by species from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021.

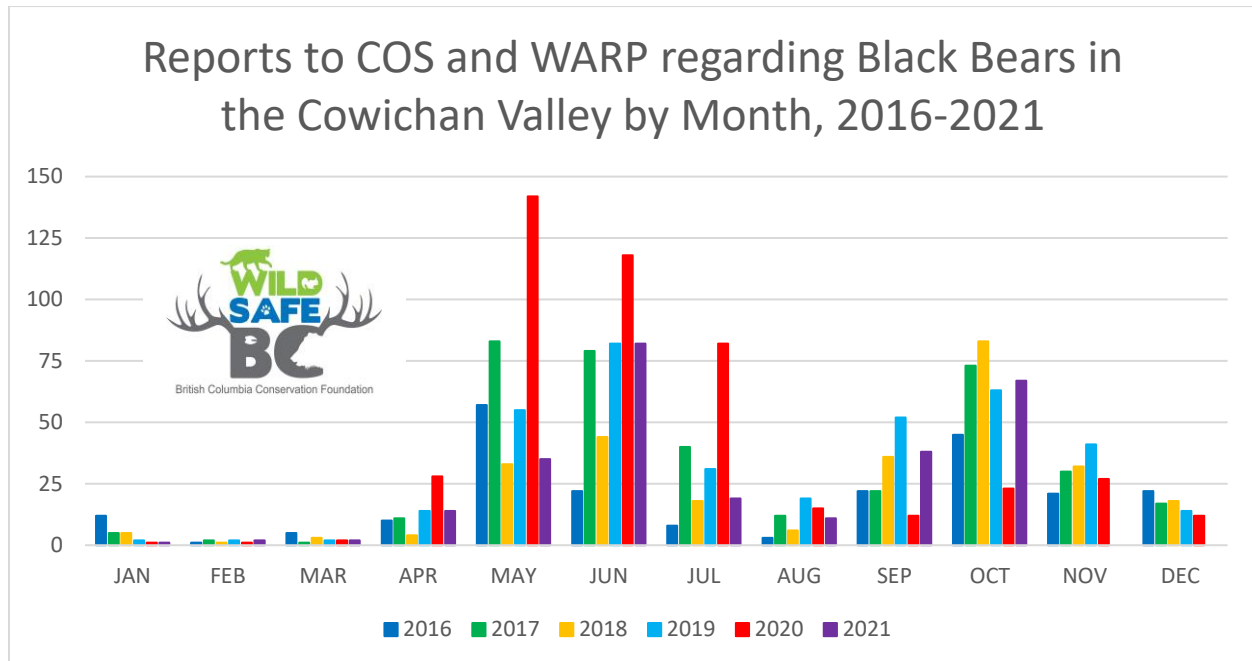


Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021.

Garbage remained the most reported black bear attractant, with 80 calls in 2021 (Figure 5). Black bears were also reported for being attracted to livestock (36 calls), compost (9 calls), residential fruit trees and berries (12 calls), and pets (14 calls). Additional attractants associated with black bear reports included bird feeders, commercial vineyards and orchards, beehives, pet food, freezers, crops, barbecues, and livestock feed.

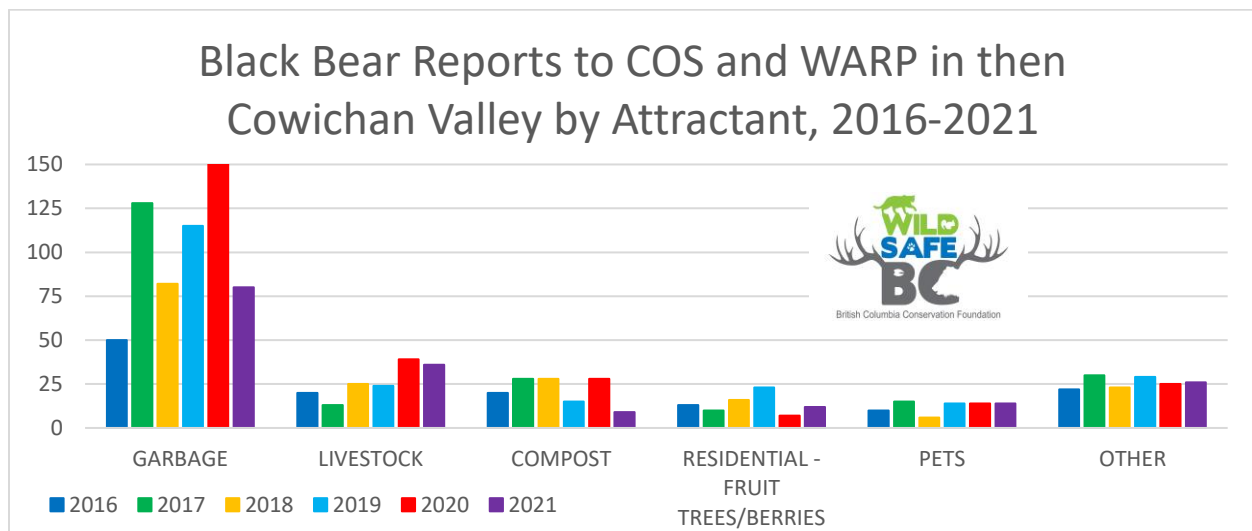


Figure 5. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP by attractant from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021.

The Cowichan Valley is composed of many communities over a large area. With regards to wildlife activity, a regional breakdown of wildlife reports can help understand patterns and allow the WCC to target hotspots with appropriate strategies to reduce human-wildlife conflict. For

clarity the WCC categorized the region into the following areas: Central/North Cowichan, Cowichan Lake, Ladysmith, and South Cowichan (Table 1).

Table 1. Cowichan Valley Areas

Area	Communities in Area
Central/North Cowichan	Chemainus, Cowichan Valley, Cowichan, Crofton, Duncan, Genoa Bay, Glenora, Maple Bay, North Cowichan, Sahtlam, Saltair, Skutz Falls, Westholme
Cowichan Lake	Caycuse, Cowichan Lake, Honeymoon Bay, Lake Cowichan, Meade Creek, Mesachie Lake, Youbou
Ladysmith	Ladysmith, Oyster Bay, Thetis Island, Yellow Point
South Cowichan	Bamberton, Cobble Hill, Cowichan Bay, Cowichan Station, Malahat, Mill Bay, Shawnigan Lake

In 2021, Cowichan Lake saw a slight increase of wildlife calls while Central/North Cowichan, Ladysmith, and the South Cowichan had lower than the average number of calls compared to the previous five years (Figure 6).

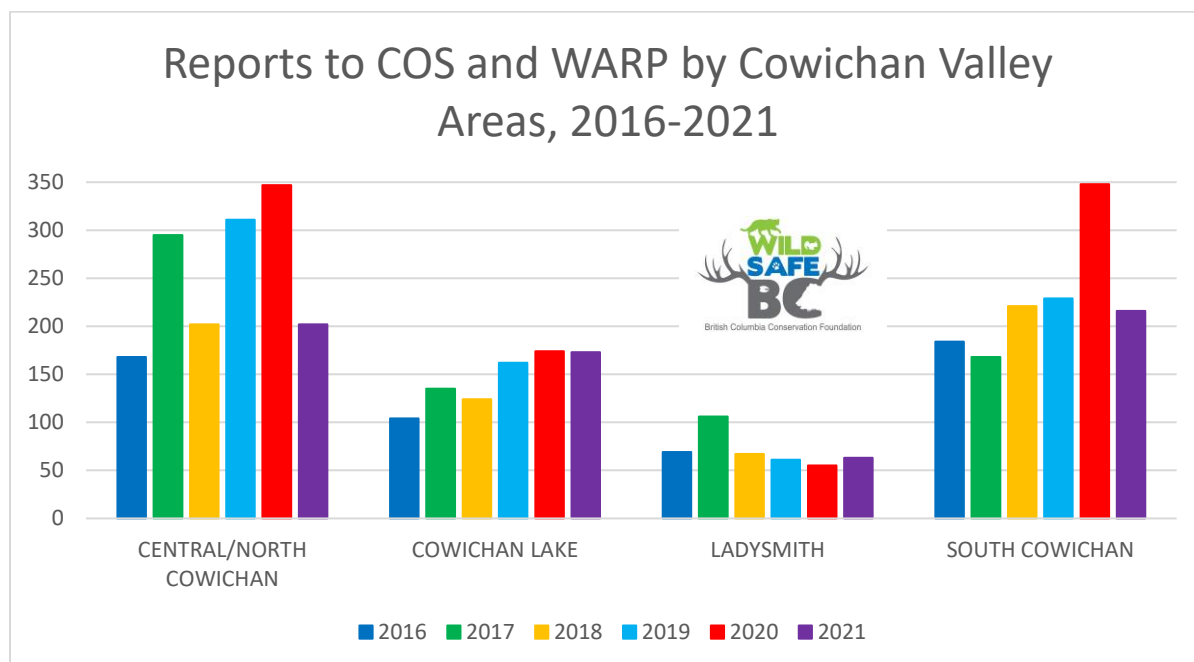


Figure 6. Reports to the COS and WARP by area in the Cowichan Valley from January 1, 2016 to November 1, 2021.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program introduces students to the concept of human-wildlife conflict and encourages them to take an active role in reducing human-wildlife conflict at home by helping their families identify backyard wildlife attractants. WildSafeBC offers outdoor and online

presentations. There were two schools and Ladysmith Parks, Recreation & Culture that participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program through outdoor presentations while allowing for physical distancing. There were 160 students who became WildSafe Rangers (Table 2) and received kits that included a WildSafe Ranger colouring book, pin, sticker, tattoo, and card.

Table 2. Schools and groups that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2021.

School/Group	Grade	No. of Classes	Students
Ecole Cobble Hill	3, 4, 5, 6	2	51
Ladysmith Primary	K/1	4	74
Ladysmith Parks, Recreation & Culture	Ages 6-12	2	35

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave three presentations in 2021 (Table 3). The first was an online Wildlife Awareness & Safety presentation to the Ladysmith Historical Society. The presentation was recorded and posted on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1_UQEgYa5I&t=1145s) (Figure 7). The video link was also reposted by the Shawnigan Rotary Club on their website and as of November 29, 2021, has been viewed on YouTube 214 times.

Table 3. WildSafeBC Presentations in the Cowichan Valley in 2021.

Group	Presentation	Date	Participants
Ladysmith Historical Society	Wildlife Awareness & Safety	May 13, 2021	6 (+214 views)
Cowichan Lake Recreation	Wildlife Safety	June 12, 2021	22
WildSafeBC	Electric Fencing	August 17, 2021	7

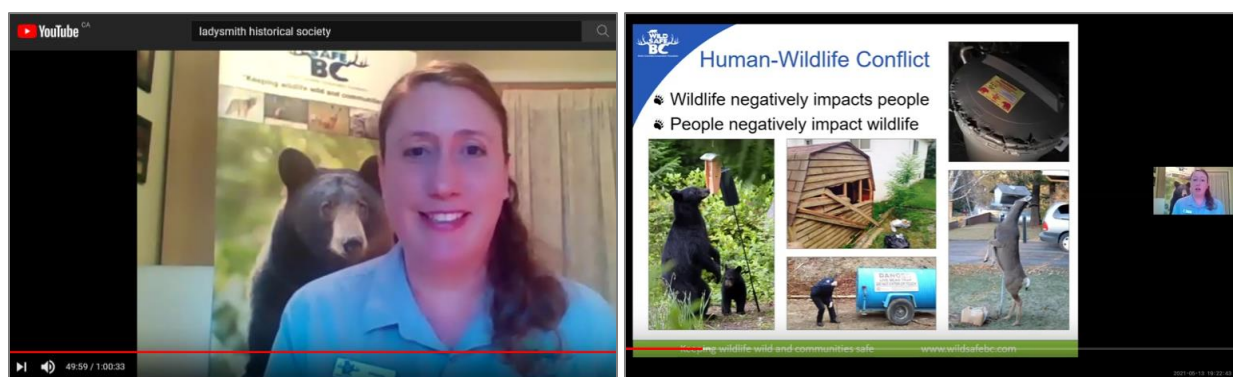


Figure 7. Wildlife Awareness & Safety presentation posted on YouTube, 2021.

The WCC also collaborated with the Cowichan Search and Rescue on a joint presentation for Cowichan Lake Recreation, where Cowichan SAR presented on wilderness safety and WildSafeBC presented on wildlife safety.

In August, the WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator and WCC brought an Electric Fencing Presentation and Demonstration to the Cowichan Valley. Seven participants learned about the necessary components of an electric fence and participated in a hands-on demonstration of a temporary electric fence (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Demonstration of setting up a temporary electric fence, August 17, 2021.

Display Booths

Although there were few public events held in 2021, the WCC had information tables at the Quw'utsun Rivers Day and the Chemainus Fall Fair (Table 4). The display on Quw'utsun Rivers Day (Figures 9 and 10) was a part of WildSafeBC's 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 BC.

Table 4. WildSafeBC information booths in the Cowichan Valley in 2021.

School	Date	Visits
Quw'utsun Rivers Day	September 25, 2021	125
Chemainus Fall Fair	October 30, 2021	100



Figure 9. The WildSafeBC booth at Quw'utsun Rivers Day, September 25, 2021.



Figure 10. Comparing hands to a black bear paw, Quw'utsun Rivers Day, September 25, 2021.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education was modified this year to consist of leaving information packages, rather than knocking on doors as has been done before 2020. If people were in their yards, the WCC was able to discuss reducing wildlife conflict in person. While in-person conversations were reduced, this method of canvassing resulting in more households receiving information through the information left by the WCC. The information package included a door hanger with WildSafeBC's Top 10 ways to reduce human-wildlife conflict, brochures on black bears, cougars and deer, and a letter detailing what attractants are and corresponding fines under the BC Wildlife Act if attractants are left unmanaged.

Through door-to-door education, a total of 33 people were reached during in-person conversations and 390 households were reached with information packages (Table 5). Lake Cowichan was prioritized for this activity in the fall due to high level of black bear activity (Figure 11).

Table 5. Door-to-door education in the Cowichan Valley in 2021.

Community	In Person Contact	Door Hanger	Total Households Visited
Ladysmith	9	55	64
Lake Cowichan	18	290	308
Shawnigan	6	45	51



Figure 11. The WCC door-to-door canvassing (left) and garbage appears to have been dragged between houses (right), Lake Cowichan, 2021.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection (Figure 12). During 12 outings, a total of 262 bins were tagged in the Municipality of North Cowichan and 132 bins were tagged in the CVRD (Table 6).



Figure 12. Bins placed at the curb the night before collection received a tag, Cowichan Valley, 2021.

Table 6. Areas that received garbage tagging in the Cowichan Valley in 2021.

Municipality	Municipal Collection Colour or Area	Bins Tagged (first night)	Bins Tagged (second night)	Households with bins out on both nights
North Cowichan	Dark Blue (N of Somenos L)	79	45	7
North Cowichan	Pink (The Properties)	92	46	6
CVRD	Youbou Meade Creek	33	25	2
CVRD	West Shawnigan	19	14	3
CVRD	Honeymoon Bay Mesachie Lake Gordon Bay	15	7	5
CVRD	Cedar Creek, Mill Bay	16	n/a	n/a
CVRD	Shawnigan Estates/Heights	3	n/a	n/a

In North Cowichan, 13 residences received stickers more than once, while 10 households had bins out on both nights in the CVRD. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours is demonstrated by the 90% of the residences whose bins were tagged during the initial survey and then were not found on the curb again during the second survey (Figure 13).

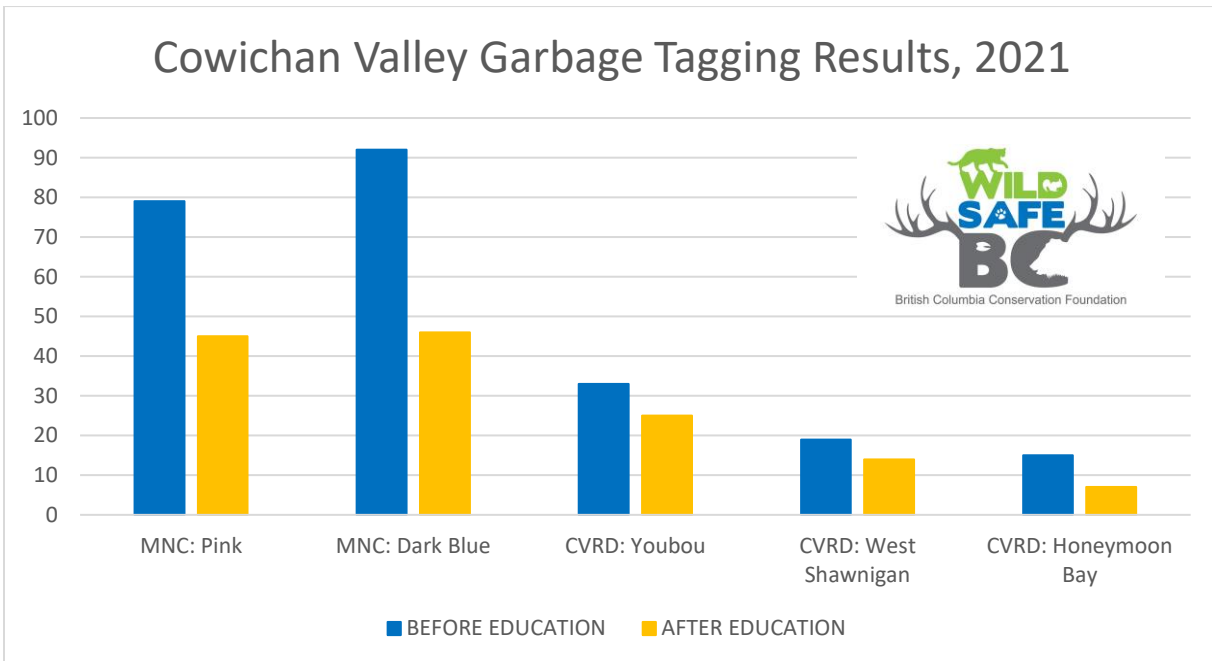


Figure 13. Number of bins placed out early for collection before and after education activities in the Cowichan Valley, 2021.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley page grew 39% in 2021 from 559 to 777 page followers.

The WCC submitted a news article to the Cowichan Valley Citizen about black bears and managing attractants that was well received and generated a booking for the WildSafe Rangers presentation. (Article online at: www.cowichanvalleycitizen.com/news/the-bears-are-back-in-town-and-so-is-wildsafebc/).

Take 5 magazine in Ladysmith also promoted the online presentation for the Ladysmith Historical Society (Online on page 13 at: https://issuu.com/take5publications/docs/online_take_5_may_2021.indd)

Challenges and Opportunities

Though the WildSafeBC program has been impacted by COVID-19 mitigation measures, WildSafeBC was able to successfully modify their traditional outreach activities and take advantage of technology to continue to deliver their program safely and effectively. These circumstances gave an opportunity to focus on connecting through social media and offering online presentations. The WCC wrote a weekly WARP update for the region, which was well

received. Only one online presentation was requested, with teachers opting to go with outdoor, physically-distanced presentations instead.

Waste continues to be the largest source of attractant in the Cowichan Valley. The region covered by the WCC has five systems and schedules of waste removal, with all but one of these regions serviced by municipalities. The challenge for garbage tagging in an area serviced by optional private waste collection (Mill Bay, Shawnigan Lake and Cobble Hill) was inconsistency in using tagging to get the message out about garbage being a bear attractant. Door-to-door education and garbage tagging was utilized to reach these areas the most effectively. A larger area was covered when canvassing in 2021 by leaving information packages rather than engaging each residence.

Another challenge in regards to waste collection is early placement of bins. Areas serviced by the CVRD are under the regional bylaw to store waste in a wild-safe manner and to place on the curb after 5am on collection morning but no other areas have a bylaw with regards to curbside placement. Garbage tagging has been an excellent way to educate residents about early curbside placement, however municipal bylaws with enforcement would also go a long way to address this issue. To address the issue of waste storage and removal in the community, the following WildSafeBC initiatives should continue in 2021:

- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through WildSafe Rangers, social media, news articles, and presentations,
- Increase presence at community events and information tables in popular spots around the valley, and
- Increased door-to-door and garbage tagging campaigns in hotspots.

Addressing attractants like livestock, fruit trees and gardens, and compost is complicated because the region is largely rural and there are residents who believe leaving fruit on the trees or dumping the fruit as a source of food for wildlife is positive. It is important to continue to educate the public about reducing human-wildlife conflict and wildlife attractants at public and online events and through social media. Holding electric fence and bear spray workshops would also assist in changing this narrative.

Many wildlife conflicts are underreported in the Cowichan Valley. After monitoring social media, the WCC has determined many people post about wildlife conflict that do not have a corresponding entry in WARP. An increased presence in the community through presentations and events in 2022 will benefit the region. Education about when and why to phone the COS, as well as door-to-door canvassing and utilizing social media, will aid in changing beliefs about reporting wildlife conflict.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, the WCC would like to thank the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Municipality of North Cowichan, the Town of Ladysmith, the Town of Lake Cowichan, the Province of BC, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for sponsoring WildSafeBC in the Cowichan Valley.

The WCC also appreciates the assistance of Sgt. Scott Norris, Sgt. Stuart Bates, Mark Kissinger, and Peter Pauwles from the BC Conservation Officer Service, Ilse Saraday, from the CVRD, Shawn Chadburn from the MNC, and volunteer Jamie Crowston. The WCC also extends a special thank you to CVRD Area Directors Sierra Acton and Mike Wilson for their Grant-In-Aid donations which enabled the WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley program to purchase a bear hide for educational purposes.

Lastly, thank you to all the residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties and learn more about our local wildlife. Let's continue to keep wildlife wild and our communities safe!