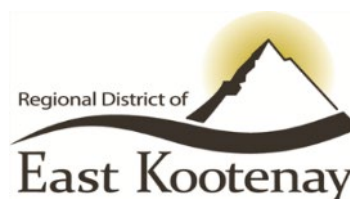


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

Elk Valley and South Country

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Elk Valley and South Country (EVSC) Program between May 1 and November 30th, 2021. The Elk Valley and surrounding Regional District of Elk Valley (RDEK) Area A and South Country and surrounding RDEK Area B are situated within Ktunaxa traditional territory (Figure 1). The area is a combination of mining towns, rural areas, farming and ranching, summer cottages and campgrounds with a variety of attractants and human-wildlife conflict. Ungulates remain the most reported species in this vast area followed by black and grizzly bears. Bear reports were much higher this year. This may be the result of productive berry crops, a higher birth rate for bears the previous five years, followed by a hot dry summer, below average berry crops, and lack of natural food which pushed bears (especially sows and cubs) into EVSC communities. This led to a particularly record-breaking September and October for human-bear conflict in Sparwood.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activity 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 Wildlife Ranger Presentations reached 218 youth
- Seven Wildlife Safety Presentations reached 179 adults
- 75 people were reached in person through door-to-door visits
- 150 people were reached via display booths at Farmers Markets
- 8 carts placed on the curb the night before collection were tagged during one patrol night in Sparwood Heights
- Over 100 posts reached more than 1,100 Facebook page followers
- 5 campgrounds are participating in the Bare Campsite Program

WildSafeBC, wildlife biologist Dr Clayton Lamb, Wildsight and Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions worked together to organize two Coexisting with Grizzly Bears Awareness Workshops featuring safety, fruit tree management and electric fencing events which were very well attended. The Bare Campsite Pilot Project at Mt Fernie Provincial Park and the Fruit Tree Removal/Replacement Pilot Project were both very well received. An invitation to do a wildlife safety presentation to Nupqu staff was a great opportunity to engage with the Ktunaxa. A diverse group of people were reached through 14 news articles in the Free Press and 19 radio interviews on “The Drive” and “Summit 107”.

The storage of garbage outdoors, unmanaged fruit trees and an increase in trail and back country use, all contribute to human-wildlife conflict. Ongoing support from sponsors, collaboration with community groups and support from local media has enabled WildSafeBC to reach a broad range of residents and visitors. Moving forward, WildSafeBC is looking forward to the opportunity to keep working with residents, visitors, and collaborating with community groups to help keep wildlife wild and communities safe.

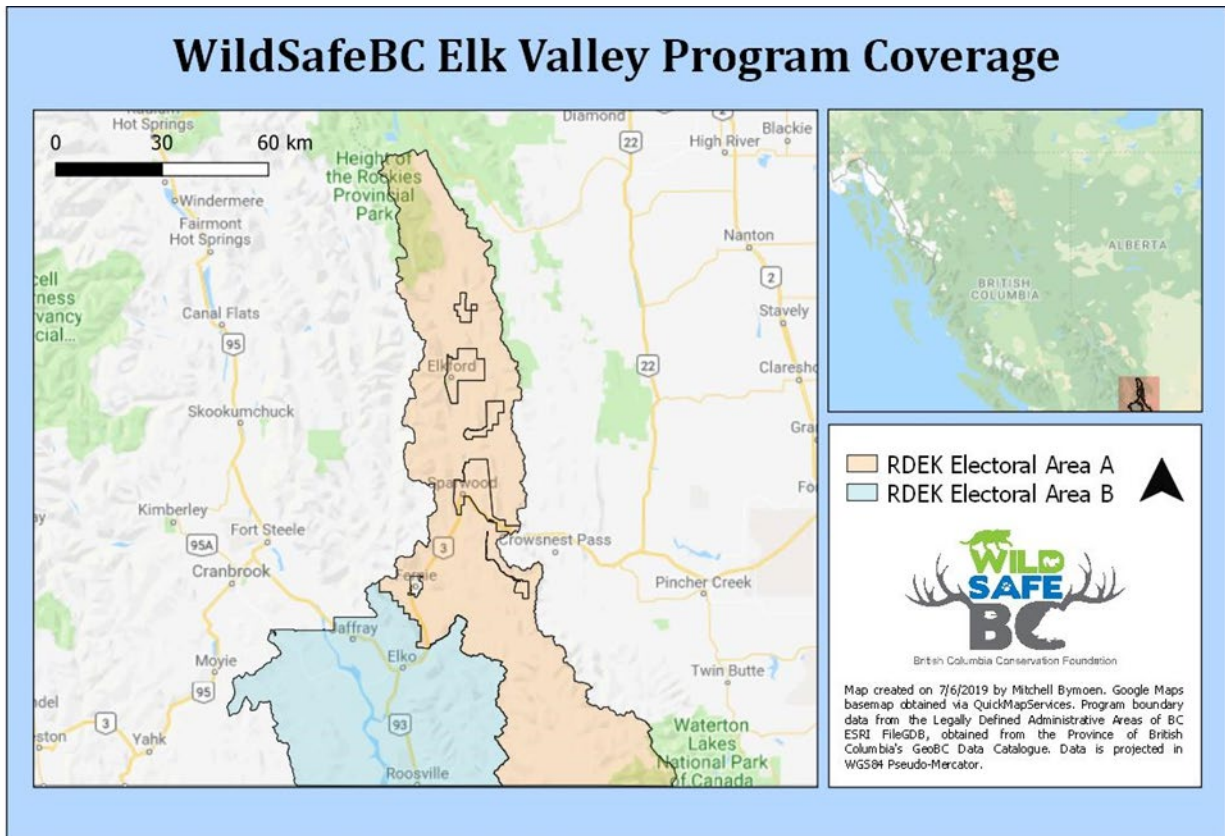


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Elk Valley and South Country program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: The WCC at the Mt Fernie Provincial Park BCP Pilot Project Kiosk. Photo courtesy of Clayton Lamb.

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 EVSC includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

Ungulates remain the most reported species in this vast area followed by black and grizzly bears (Figure 2). So far this year, there were 86 black bear reports which is a new record and much higher than 2020 with 27 reports. This may be the result of productive berry crops in previous years resulting a higher birth rate for bears, followed by a hot dry summer, below average berry crop and lack of natural food driving bears (sows with cubs) into communities. This lead to a particularly record-breaking September and October (Figure 3), especially in Sparwood. Bears were initially reported on the fringe of town accessing fruit trees and eventually made their way into town, learned to access bear resistant carts and cause property damage. More people living, working, travelling and recreating in the EVSC has also increased the potential for human-wildlife conflict and bear mortality due to vehicle and train collisions. Black and grizzly bears were reported in South Country campgrounds for the first time in several years.

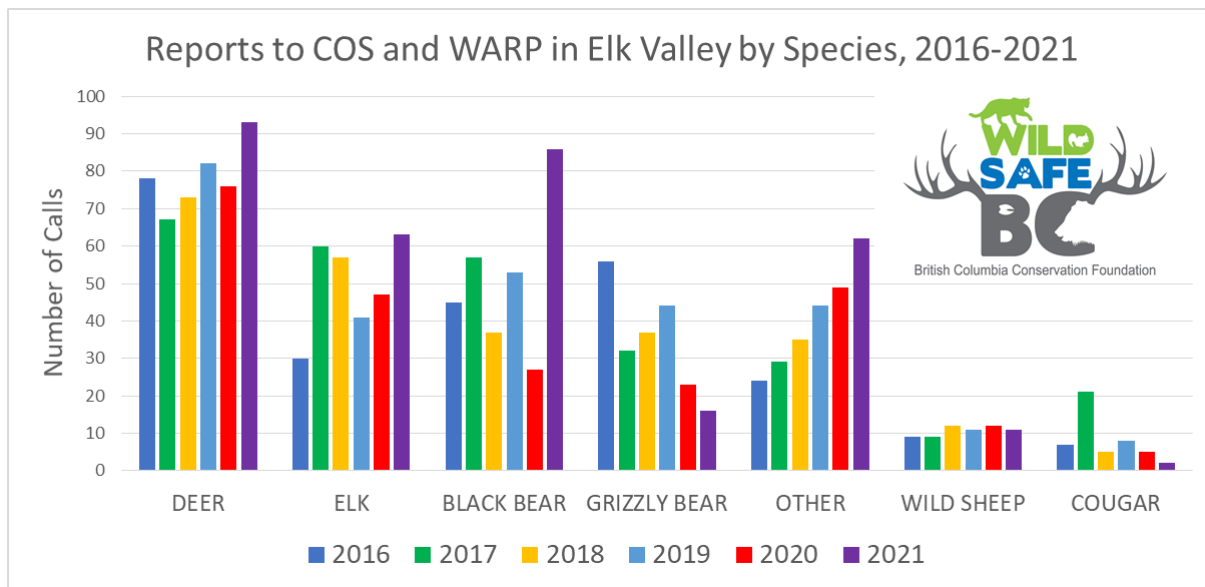


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP by species from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

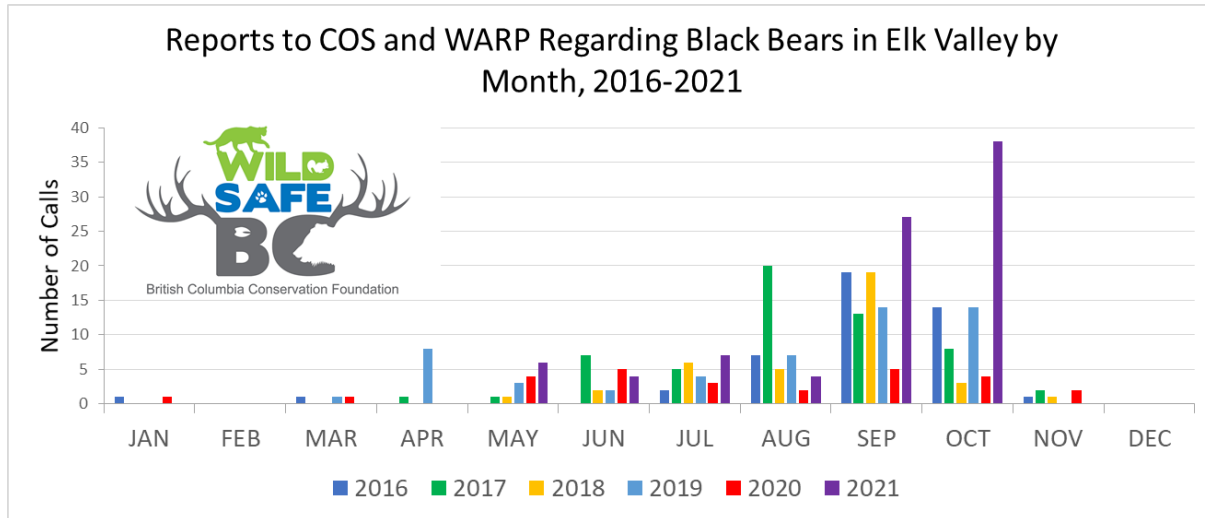


Figure 3. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP by month, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by fruit trees which received more reports this year. However, it is suspected that fruit trees are underreported as they are viewed as a more natural food source and the connection to conflict is not generally well-accepted or understood by the public (Figure 4).

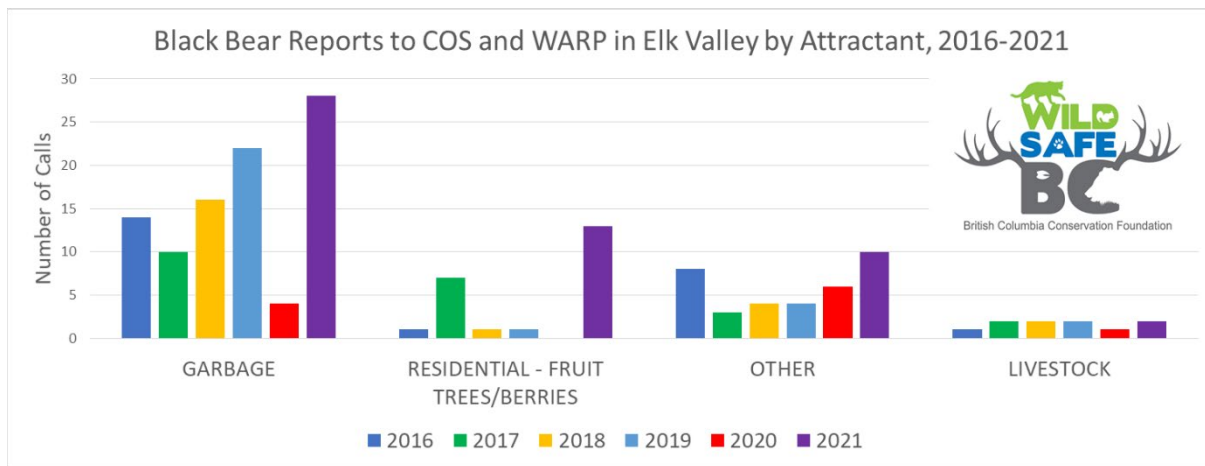


Figure 4. Black bear reports to COS and WARP by attractant in the EVSC.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of eight schools, preschools and youth groups participated in the WRP. A total of 218 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits (Table 1).

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

School or Group	Grade or Age	Students
Rocky Mtn High School (webinar)	Grade 7	20
Sparwood Youth Go Girls	9 to 13 years	18
Rocky Mtn High School group 2	Grade 7	20
Sparwood Youth Camp	7 to 12 yrs	15
Sparwood Youth Camp	3 to 6 yrs	20
Outdoor Connections Forest School	preschool aged	24
FJ Mitchell Elementary Sparwood	Kindergarten	85
Outdoor Connections Forest School	5 to 7 years	16



Figure 5. The WCC delivering the WRP to a preschool group. Photo courtesy of Corrine Hoetmer

Presentations to Community Groups

The WildSafeBC Program including wildlife biology, how to prevent and respond to wildlife encounters, and safe use of bear spray was delivered to 183 adults in person outdoors and via zoom to seven different groups of interest (Table 2, Figure 6).

Table 2. Groups and organizations that attended WSBC Wildlife Safety and Bear Spray presentations in 2021.

Organization	Attendees
CBAL webinar	15
Island lake Lodge Staff	30
Fernie Alpine Resort Staff Gr 1	19
Mt Fernie Provincial Park Staff	4
Fernie Alpine Resort Staff Gr 2	12
Grizzly Bear Event RDEK Area A	30
NUPQU Development	48
Grizzly Bear Event RDEK area B	25



Figure 6. The WCC demonstrating how to safely use bear spray. Photo courtesy of Jen King.

Display Booths

The WildSafeBC display booth was set up at the Sparwood and Baynes Lake Farmers' markets where the WCC had to opportunity to interact with over 150 people.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Over 70 contacts were made during door-to-door visits with people who reside in areas with wildlife activity. In the past education was targeted at garbage kept outdoors between collection days. Over 500 Newsletters including wildlife safety and attractant management were prepared by WildSafeBC and distributed via email through the Fernie Alpine Resort (FAR), Tie Lake and Rosen Lake homeowners' associations and the (FAR) staff newsletter. This was a very effective way to distribute information to a large group of residents in a vast area.

Following record breaking reports of bears accessing garbage and damaging bear resistant carts later in October, eight carts placed on the curb the night before collection were tagged during one patrol night in Sparwood Heights. Garbage tagging was not conducted anywhere else in this large rural area where there is no curb side garbage collection.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Elk Valley Facebook page grew 9% in 2021 from 984 to 1,104-page followers and over 100 posts. The WCC submitted regular articles and was contacted to do several interviews with the Free Press. The Drive 99.1 and Summit 107 radio station also contacted the coordinator on a regular basis for wildlife updates and educational messages. A broad range of people throughout a large geographic area were reached through 14 news articles in the Free Press, 1 article for CBC news and 11 radio interviews.

Wildlife in Area Signs

The WildSafeBC “Wildlife in Area” signs were placed in areas with current activity and served as a reminder for people to give wildlife space and to keep garbage and other attractants secure. The signs were left for one week at a time and removed if wildlife had moved on so that people didn’t become desensitized to the message. Signs were given to bylaw officers in Sparwood, residents in Tie Lake and the COS as it wasn’t always feasible to travel to these communities due to time and budget constraints.

This initiative also proved to be a great opportunity to engage the neighborhood, start discussions and create awareness for people passing by, long-time residents, new seasonal residents and visitors. The signs are a very effective tool to get the message out to a broad range of people in a larger geographic area when it is not always possible to do door-to-door canvassing.

Collaborations

The WildSafeBC Program has been very well supported, received, and in demand from organizations and residents throughout the RDEK. Over the years, the program has formed many valuable partnerships and has collaborated with many community organizations. Events and educational efforts were supported Fernie Alpine Resort, Island Lake Lodge and the Sparwood Mountain Bike Club. Wildlife biologist Dr Clayton Lamb, Wildsight and Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions worked together to organize two Coexisting with Grizzly Bears Awareness Workshops featuring safety, fruit tree management, and electric fencing workshops which were very well attended. There continues to be great communication between the COS, bylaw officers and WildSafeBC which enabled response to human-wildlife conflict in a large area. The distribution of newsletters to residents at Fernie Alpine Resort, Tie Lake and Rosen Lake was facilitated by the respective homeowners’ associations and enabled WildSafeBC to reach over 500 residents via email.

WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

Through the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program (WBCP), WildSafeBC is able to provide clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. Mount Fernie Provincial Park Campground was selected to conduct a pilot project for the WBCP. The program was very well received by staff and campers alike.

Thanks to the success of the pilot project the WBCP will be presented to the East Kootenay Parks group which consists of 12 campgrounds.

This testimonial from staff member Emma Genest speaks to the success of the WBCP. “From my perspective, the program was a huge success. It was very impactful on our guests, and most of our campers were fully on board. This was evident based on the impeccably tidy campsites we saw every day. The Bare Camping materials (pamphlets, posters, etc) were excellent tools to effectively communicate our expectations to campers and gave us a great framework to work from. The result was very tidy campsites free of wildlife attractants, happy campers, happy staff (because we weren’t spending all our time relocating attractants), a safe campground, and a great outcome for wildlife!”

So far, five campgrounds are participating in the WBCP, two others are interested and based on the success of the pilot project we plan to present the program to many more campground operators.



Figure 7. A proud family receives a Green Bear Review Card. Congratulations your site is considered a “bare campsite”.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC was asked to present a wildlife awareness and safe use of bear spray again this year to 48 staff members at the annual get together for Nupqu which is owned by the Ktunaxa National Council. This was a great opportunity to engage with the Ktunaxa. The WCC was also contacted to provide advice and resources to help mitigate human-grizzly bear conflict at the Tobacco Plains Reserve where grizzly bears were reported accessing unsecured garbage.

Special Initiatives

This year the WCC worked with wildlife biologist Dr Clayton Lamb on a Cost-share Fruit Tree Removal and Replacement Pilot Project. Activities included targeted door to door education and promotion to properties with fruit trees known to attract grizzly bears on Dickens Road and Hosmer, a media release in the Free Press, promotion on social media and very well attended Coexisting with Grizzly Bears presentations. Three landowners who removed problem apple trees and replaced them with non-fruit bearing trees were compensated \$400 and an unknown number of residents voluntarily chose to remove fruit trees. In many other instances landowners who were reluctant to remove fruit trees agreed to prune and/or manage trees responsibly. The COS really appreciated the opportunity to refer landowners with problem trees to the WCC who had the ability to provide solutions and support to help resolve human-wildlife conflict. Funding for this successful pilot project was acquired by Dr. Clayton Lamb through the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. We already have a wait list for next year as this year's budget has been used up.



Figure 8. A sow and cub no longer accessing crab apples on a rural property in Sparwood. Photo courtesy of Shelley Wedderburn.

Challenges and Opportunities

The program coverage area of Elk Valley, South Country, and RDEK Areas A and B, is a large with a combination of mining towns, rural areas, farming and ranching, summer cottages and campgrounds with a variety of attractants and human-wildlife conflict. All these groups have different levels of understanding and tolerance for wildlife, especially grizzly bears, and require innovative educational efforts and collaboration with other community groups and agencies to help educate this diverse group of people.

As the area continues to grow and develop there will always be new people, new bears, and other wildlife. Bear activity was reported throughout the area the entire season with record breaking human-bear conflict reports later in October. An increase in traffic on Highway 3, unsecured garbage, and fruit trees, have all contributed to human-wildlife conflict and grizzly bear mortality.

To continue reducing human-wildlife conflicts in the region, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2022:

- Continue existing education campaigns and reach a broader range of people through collaboration with community organizations such as: Sparwood Trails Alliance, Sparwood Youth Groups, Tie Lake, Rosen Lake and F.A.R. Homeowners Associations, Island Lake Lodge, Baynes Lake Lions Club, Girl Guides and others.
- Continue progress made with the Fruit Tree Removal/Replacement Pilot Project with wildlife biologist Clayton Lamb.
- Keep promoting electric fencing and referring property owners with livestock, chickens and bees to Grizzly Bear Solutions
- Promote the importance of preventing encounters in recreation areas and encourage safe use of bear spray with local bike shops and at local trail heads.
- Engage and recognize more businesses through the WildSafeBC Business Pledge.
- Continue progress with the very successful Bare Campsite Program Pilot Project at Mt Fernie Provincial Park, East Kootenay Parks and other independent campgrounds.
- Deliver posters, brochures and other educational materials to central locations such as gas stations, campgrounds and other public places.
- Continue building relationships with Nupqu which is owned and operated by the Ktunaxa National Council.
- Continue progress with the District of Sparwood and provide support for the recommendations made at the November Council meeting: community bear resistant bins for shift workers, removal of fruit trees on city property and residences, delay garbage collection start in areas of conflict and electric fencing for chicken coops.

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC is grateful for the generous support the program receives from sponsors, partners, and volunteers. Thanks to our sponsors: the Province of BC, Columbia Basin Trust, British

Columbia Conservation Foundation, District of Sparwood, and the RDEK Areas A and B. Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: Conservation Officers Patricia Burley and Ryan Gordon, Bylaw Officer Frank DeBoon, Wildlife Biologist Clayton Lamb, Grizzly Bear Solutions, Savage Marketing, Fernie.com, Free Press, The Drive 99.1 and Summit 107 radio stations, Sparwood Mountain Bike Club, Sparwood Youth Groups, F.A.R., Island Lake Lodge and volunteers Dan Savage and Jen King. Finally, thank you to everyone for trying to be a good neighbor this season by removing wildlife attractants from their properties and preventing human-wildlife conflict when out in recreational areas. Let's keep wildlife wild and our community safe!