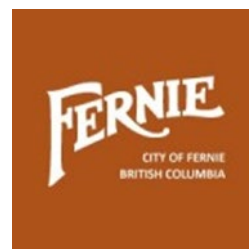


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

Fernie

Prepared by: Kathy Murray, WildSafeBC Fernie Coordinator



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Fernie Program between May 1st and November 30th. The Program covers the City of Fernie is located on traditional Ktunaxa Territory (Figure 1). Collaboration with community groups has enabled WildSafeBC to reach a broad range of people and use initiative, innovation and education to ultimately help prevent human-wildlife conflict.

As of October 31st, there were 200 black bear reports which is much higher than the 5-year average of 55. Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by fruit trees. Grizzly bear activity was also above average with 21 reports so far this year. This may be a result of a hot dry summer, a decrease in natural food availability, more household garbage produced by people staying home, a significant increase in back country and trail use and travel along Highway 3.

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:

- There were 7 WildSafe Ranger Presentations that reached 205 youth
- A total of 10 Wildlife Safety Presentations reached 187 adults
- Over 200 people were reached via display booths at the Fernie Fall Fair and the Fernie Info Centre Trailhead
- Through door-to-door visits over 170 contacts were made
- There were 19 carts placed on the curb the night before collection that were tagged during two patrol nights
- Over 100 posts reached more than 1,100 Facebook page followers
- The Fernie RV Resort pledged its participation in the Bare Campsite Program

WildSafeBC, wildlife biologist Dr Clayton Lamb, Wildsight and Grizzly Bear Solutions worked together to organize a Coexisting with Grizzly Bears Awareness Workshop featuring safety, fruit tree management and electric fencing events which was very well attended.

Educational efforts were directed towards the responsible management of fruit trees which continue to be under reported and attract wildlife into Fernie. WildSafeBC collaborated with Wildlife Biologist Clayton Lamb to work on a fruit tree removal/replacement pilot project which was very well received by landowners and the COS. An invitation to do a wildlife safety presentation to Nupqu Fernie Field staff was a great opportunity to engage with the Ktunaxa. WildSafeBC and Tourism Fernie worked together to produce a Wildlife Safety Video. 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.

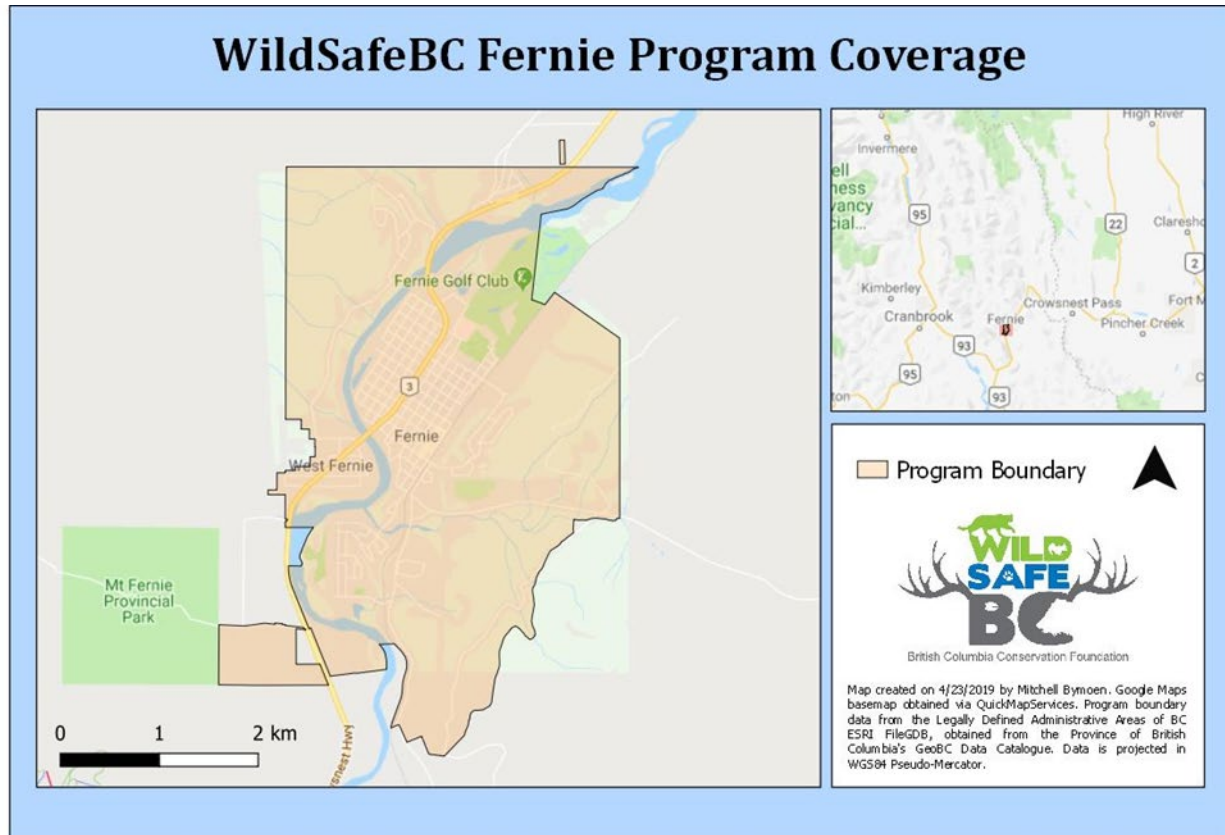


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Fernie Program coverage area.

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Highlights from the 2021 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 the WildSafeBC Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) on the WildSafeBC website. This data is updated daily and this report for Fernie includes data from January 1st, 2016 to October 31st, 2021 (Figure 2).

So far this year, there were 200 black bear reports which is higher than the 5-year average of 55. Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by fruit trees (Figure 3). Grizzly bear activity was also well above the five-year average of 13 with 21 reports so far 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 crop and lack of natural food. More people living, working, travelling and recreating in Fernie has also increased the potential for human-wildlife conflict.

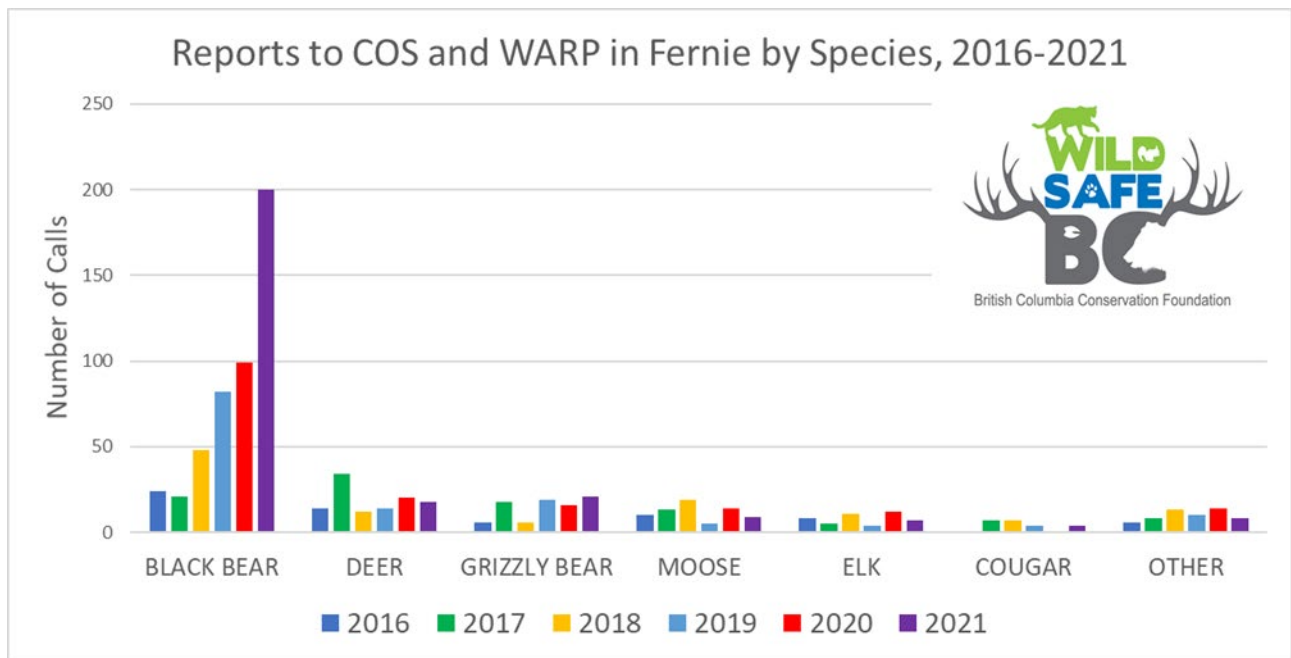


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP by species, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021

Garbage remains the most reported bear attractant in 2021. 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 3).

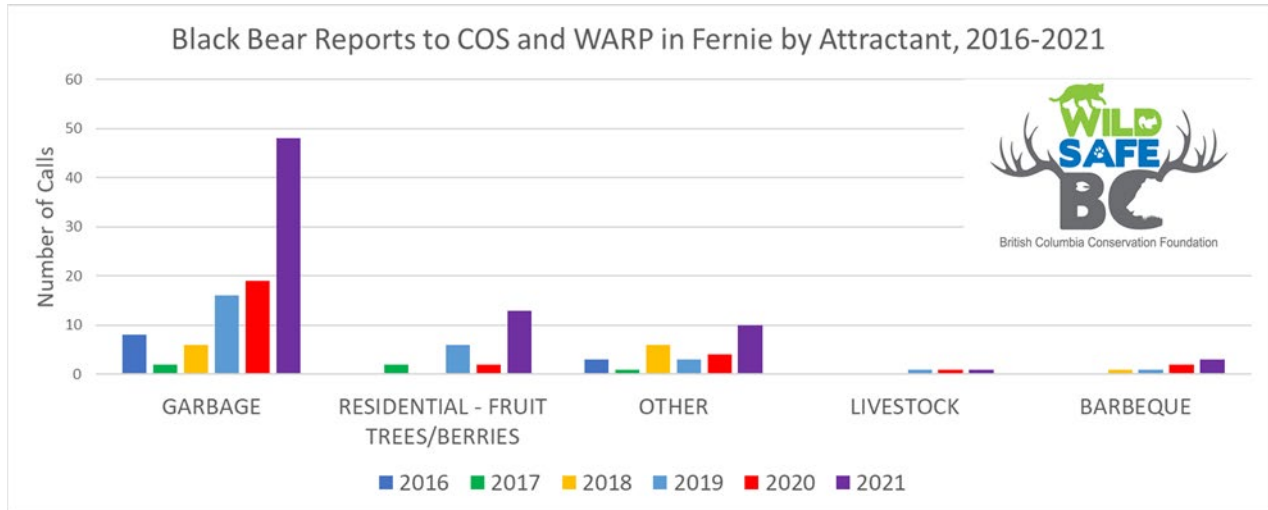


Figure 3. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP by attractant, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict (Figure 4). A total of four schools and preschools participated in the WRP. Over 200 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits (Table 1).



Figure 4. The WCC teaching preschoolers how to look for signs of wildlife activity.

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

School or Group	Grade	Students
Fernie Child Care Society	preschool	55
Bright Beginnings	preschool	41
I.D.E.S.	Kindergarten	90
Kootenay Discovery School	Grade 2 to 5	19

Presentations to Community Groups

WildSafeBC presentations that included information on wildlife biology and behaviour, how to prevent and respond to wildlife encounters, and safe use of bear spray, were delivered to over 200 adults in person outdoors and via Zoom to various groups of interest (Table 2, Figure 5).

Table 2. Organizations that received the WildSafeBC Wildlife Awareness and Safety education in 2021.

Organization	Attendees
Cycling Without Ages	7
Women who Wander via zoom	40
Fernie Ambassador Program	20
Fernie Trails Alliance Trail Crew	6
SRGBP Volunteers	10
Mt Fernie Provincial Park Staff	5
NUPQU Field Staff	3
Coexisting with Grizzlies Event	75
MAST Program	19
Fernie Visitor Centre Public	22



Figure 5. The WCC teaching the Cycling without Ages Volunteers about wildlife safety.

Display Booths

The WildSafeBC display booth was set up at 2 events in Fernie this year and over 200 personal contacts were made.

Table 3. WildSafeBC display booth 2021.

Event	Date	Contacts Made
Fernie Fall Fair	12-Sep	170
Fernie Info Centre Trail Head	18-Sep	42

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Over 170 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. This year educational efforts were directed towards the responsible management of fruit trees which continue to be under reported and attract wildlife into Fernie. As a result, 37 personal contacts addressing fruit trees were made and many were referred to the Fruit Tree Removal/Replacement Pilot Project (refer to Special Initiatives section).

Garbage tagging was conducted on two evenings the night before garbage collection. Area 1 (Maintown, Ridgemont and Castle Mountain) was patrolled once and a total of two carts on 5th Avenue in Maintown were tagged. Area 2 (Alpine Parkland, West Fernie, Annex and Mountainview) was patrolled once and nine carts in Alpine Trails and eight carts in the Annex were tagged with garbage out the night before collection. A follow up visit with educational materials was made to all properties who had garbage out the night before collection. The majority of garbage complaints in Fernie are about bears accessing garbage kept outdoors between collection days.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Elk Valley Facebook page grew 9% in 2021 from 984 to 1,104 page followers as a result of over 100 posts made to the page over the season. 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 and 19 radio interviews.

Wildlife in Area Signs

The WildSafeBC Bear in Area lawn signs were placed in areas with current activity and served as a reminder for people to give wildlife space (when seen) and a reminder to keep garbage and other attractants secure. The signs were left for one week at a time and removed if wildlife had moved on or moved to an adjacent strategic location so that people didn't become desensitized to the message. 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. The WCC had many requests from the COS and bylaw services to put up signs. On occasion the signs were stolen and often the metal legs were damaged by the wind. The vertical Wildlife in Area signs were put up on posts or trees using cable ties at trailheads and in parks. These signs are durable, cost effective, and the icons and messaging are straightforward.

Collaborations

The WildSafeBC Program has been very well supported, received and in demand from organizations, visitors and residents in Fernie. Over the years the program has collaborated with many community organizations. WildSafeBC worked with Tourism Fernie to produce a Wildlife and Safety on the Trail video. Events and educational efforts were supported by the Fernie Visitor Information Centre (Figure 6), Fernie Trails Alliance, Fernie Mountain Bike Club, Arts Station, Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions, wildlife biologist Dr Clayton Lamb, Wildsight, the COS and Fernie Bylaw Services.



Figure 6. The permanent WildSafeBC display at the Fernie Visitor Information Centre.

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. The Fernie RV Resort, the only campground in Fernie, has the necessary infrastructure, resources and staff training, and has taken positive steps forward to support the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC had the opportunity to do a Wildlife Awareness and Safe Use of Bear Spray Workshop for five Fernie-based field staff for Nupqu (Ktunaxa word for bear). This first engagement led to the opportunity to present to over 50 staff in the East Kootenay later in the season. Nupqu is owned by the Ktunaxa National Council and conducts environmental work throughout the RDEK.

Special Initiatives

This year the WCC worked with wildlife biologist Dr Clayton Lamb on a Fruit Tree Removal/Replacement Pilot Project that provided subsidies for people to remove fruit trees that were not well-managed and led to conflicts with grizzly bears. Activities included targeted door-to-door education and promotion to properties with fruit trees known to attract bears, media release in the Fernie Free Press, promotion on social media, and a very well-attended Coexisting with Grizzly Bears presentation. A total of five 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 (Figure 7). This program generated considerable interest and there is a waitlist for 2022. 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 pilot project was acquired by Dr. Clayton Lamb through the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative.



Figure 7. Crabapple tree attracting wildlife (left) which is then replaced with a “Crimson” red maple (right).

Challenges and Opportunities

The storage of garbage outdoors between collection days and unmanaged fruit trees continue to be a source of attractants that draw wildlife into residential areas. More people in Fernie have created excess garbage. Fernie is made up of a combination of long-time residents, seasonal workers, second home owners and visitors who all have different levels of understanding and tolerance for wildlife, especially grizzly bears. Innovative educational efforts and collaboration with other community groups and agencies are required to help educate this diverse group of people. This year educational efforts were targeted to the management of fruit trees. The WCC collaborated with wildlife biologist Dr Clayton Lamb on a fruit tree replacement pilot project which proved very effective.

As Fernie continues to grow and develop there will always be new people, new bears, and other wildlife. Black and grizzly bear activity was reported throughout the city of Fernie and the surrounding recreational areas the entire season. A significant increase in backcountry and trail use caused an increase in human-wildlife sightings and encounters. An increase in traffic on Highway 3 has also contributed to wildlife mortality due to collisions with vehicles.

The following initiatives should continue to be implemented in 2022:

- Continue work with Dr Clayton Lamb on the Fruit Tree Removal/Replacement Project
- Continue existing education campaigns and collaboration with community organizations such as: Fernie Trails Alliance, Fernie Mountain Bike Club, Fernie Information Centre, Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions and Tourism Fernie.
- Continue communication and educational efforts with the City of Fernie Bylaw Services
- 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.
- Reach out to promote and get more businesses to commit to the WildSafeBC Business Pledge
- Continue progress with the Bare Campsite Program with the Fernie RV Resort and East Kootenay Parks
- Continue building relationships with the Ktunaxa and Nupqu

The WildSafeBC Program continues to be very well supported, received and in demand from various organizations, residents and visitors in Fernie. Over the years the program has formed many valuable partnerships and should continue collaborating with community organizations to help keep wildlife wild and communities safe.

Acknowledgements

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