

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

Rossland-Trail

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Rossland/Trail Program between May 1st and November 30th, 2021. This program covers the cities of Rossland (Figure 1) and Trail (Figure 2). WildSafeBC acknowledges that this area is within the traditional and unceded territory of the Sinixt, Ktunaxa and Syilx Indigenous Peoples and strives to work with all Indigenous Nations to protect wildlife and communities. In both Rossland and Trail, the primary attractant reported in 2021 was garbage, with black bears being the most common species reported to the Conservation Office Service (COS). There were also reports of sightings or conflict with grizzly bears, deer, coyotes and cougars. Smaller wildlife (skunks, raccoons and ground squirrels) were also discussed and advised upon directly with locals.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activity with the goal of preventing and mitigating 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:

- 13 WildSafe Ranger presentations made, reaching 252 participants.
- 5 presentations given to community groups with 30 participants
- In person door-to-door reached 123 individuals and 111 door hangers were distributed.
- Very few bins were tagged early in the season in Trail with none tagged in Rossland, with no bins tagged in the final three months of the program during garbage tagging
- There were 8 display booths and 370 people reached
- 59 of Facebook posts and 110 new Facebook page followers from January 1, 2021 to November 30, 2021; a growth of 16%
- 2 new businesses signed on to the WildSafeBC Business Pledge

The community of Rossland has begun pursuing Bear Smart Community designation and have formed a working group to continue those efforts across seasons. WildSafeBC and the Bear Smart Working Group in Rossland are collaborating on strategies to recommend to the City of Rossland. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe.

Key challenges throughout the year included low reporting of incidents to the Conservation Office Service, lack of access to affordable waste receptacles, inconsistent trash pickup times, improper management of garbage between collection days, fruit trees attracting wildlife into city limits and food-conditioned bears breaking into homes. During the 2021 season, the WCC also encountered several obstacles to full delivery of the program, such as poor air quality due to wildfires, intense heat waves, and lack of markets and events due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

WildSafeBC thanks the Cities of Trail and Rossland, the BC Conservation Foundation, Columbia Basin Trust and the Province of British Columbia for sponsoring this program.

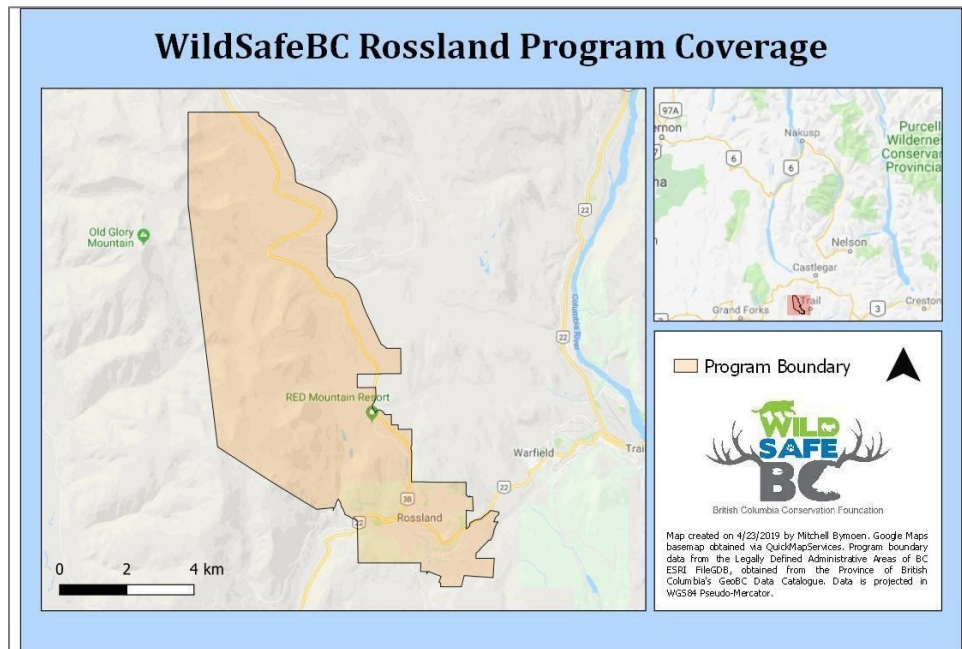


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Rossland program coverage area.



Figure 2. WildSafe BC Trail program coverage area

Cover Photo: WCC Cheyanna Shypitka attending Trail's Incredible Farmers' Market with an information booth. Photo credit: Tara Gleboff

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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) 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 Rossland and Trail includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021 (Figure 2).

In Rossland, black bears remained the most reported species to the RAPP line (Figure 3). There were 97 black bear reports made to the COS in 2021 which far exceeds the 6-year annual average of 48 (2016-2021). Reports of black bears were highest in September and June 2021, with nearly all months having more reports than previous years (Figure 4). Garbage was the most reported attractant in Rossland, with "other" and residential fruit trees being the second and third most reported attractants in 2021 (Figure 5). "Other" includes sightings within urban areas, aggressive behaviour, orphaned cubs, bears breaking in to people's homes and other categories not listed. Reports of conflict with other species were also higher than average, with 18 reports related to coyotes and 9 reports related to grizzly bears (Figure 3). Increased reports to the RAPP line may be in part due to the 2021 wildfires, which blazed steadily from early July to mid-September and compromised large areas of local natural habitat.

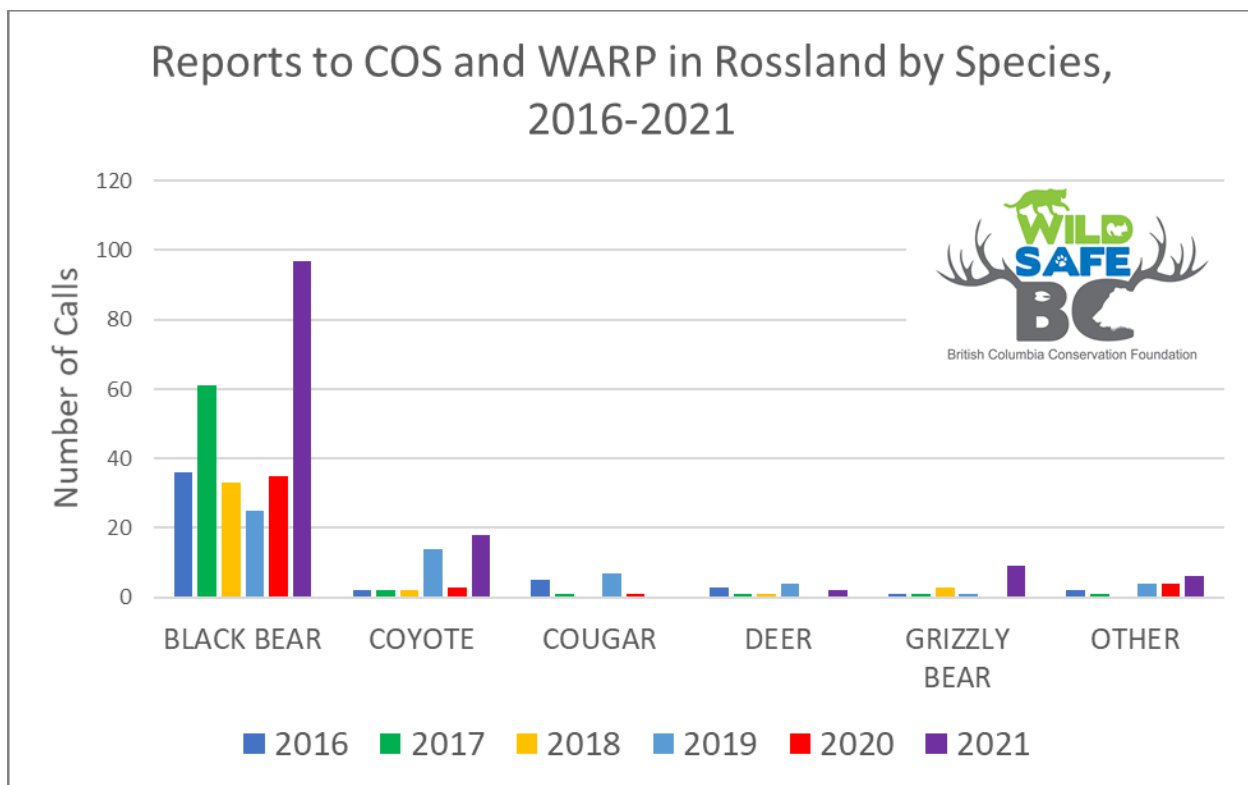


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP by species in Rossland from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

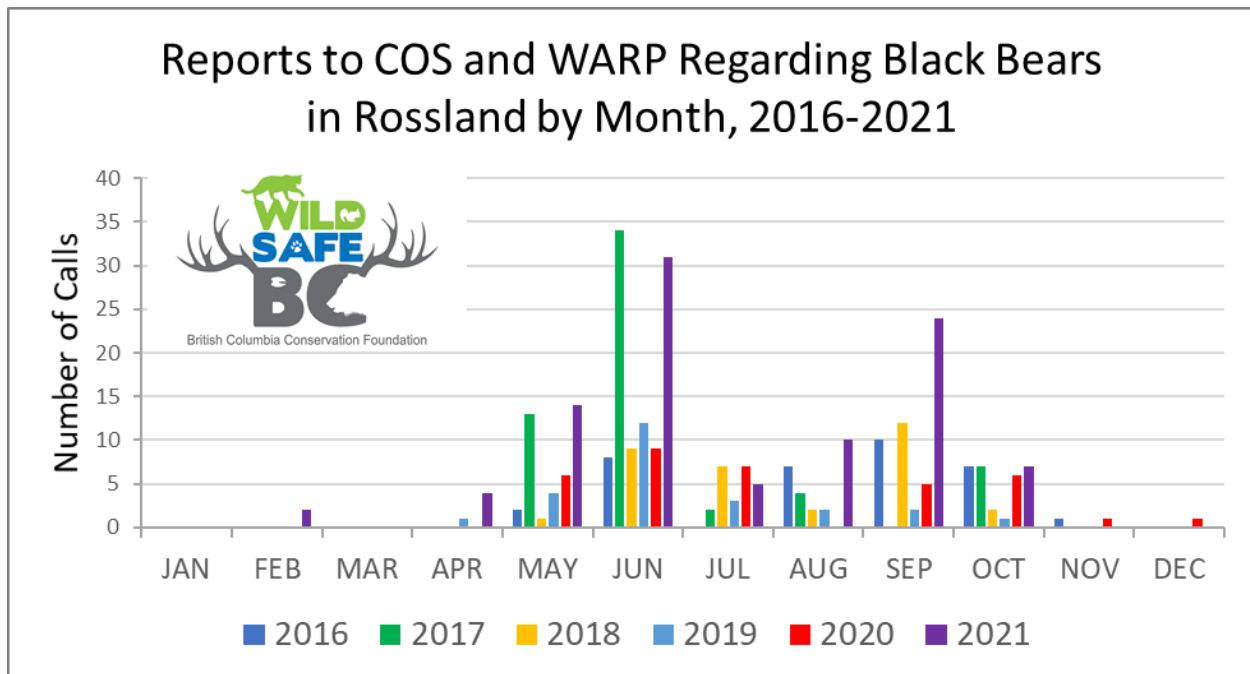


Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears in Rossland from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

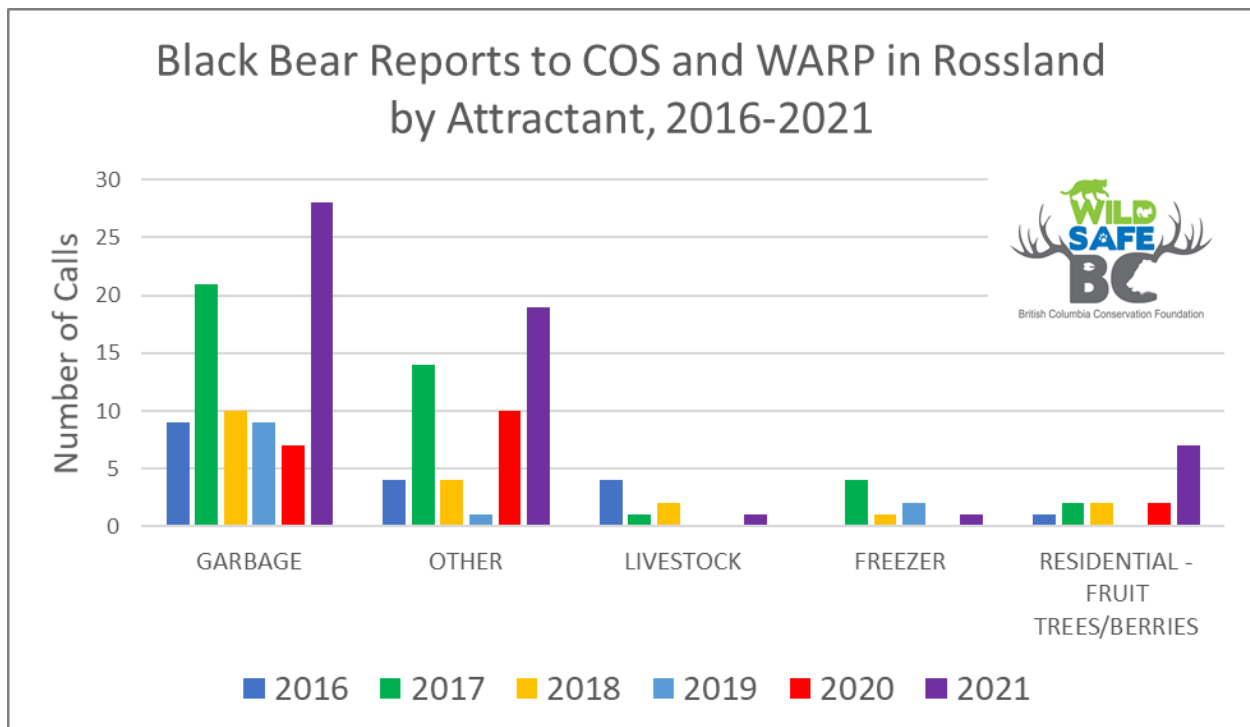


Figure 5. Reports to the COS and WARP by attractant in Rossland from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

Black bears were also the most reported species in Trail (Figure 6). There were 138 black bear reports made to the COS in 2021 which is lower than the 6-year average of 159 (2016-2021), but similar to the 5-year average of 139 (2017-2021). Reports of black bears were highest in September 2021 (Figure 7). This may be due to low natural food availability as a result of a very dry summer, rife with forest fires. For a sixth year in a row, garbage was the most reported attractant in Trail, with fruit trees being the second most reported attractant in 2021 (Figure 8). Reports of conflict with most other species were lower than average (Figure 6).

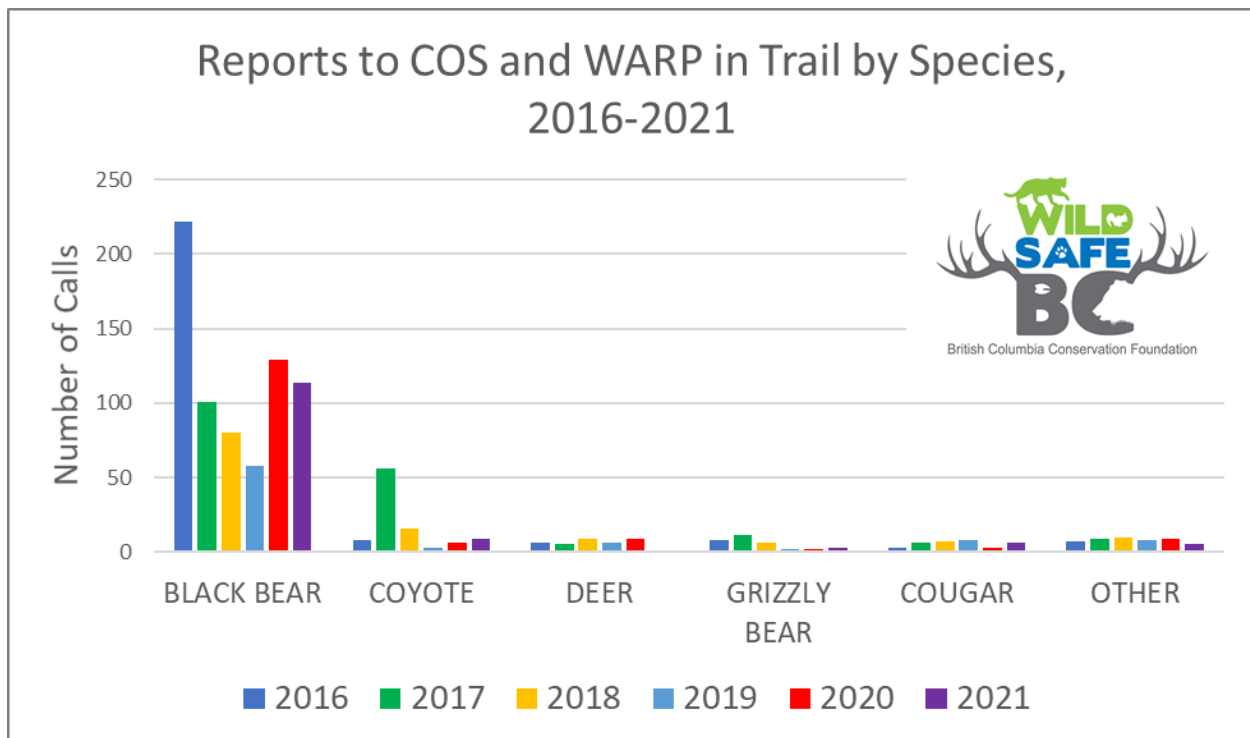


Figure 6. Reports to the COS and WARP by species in Trail from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

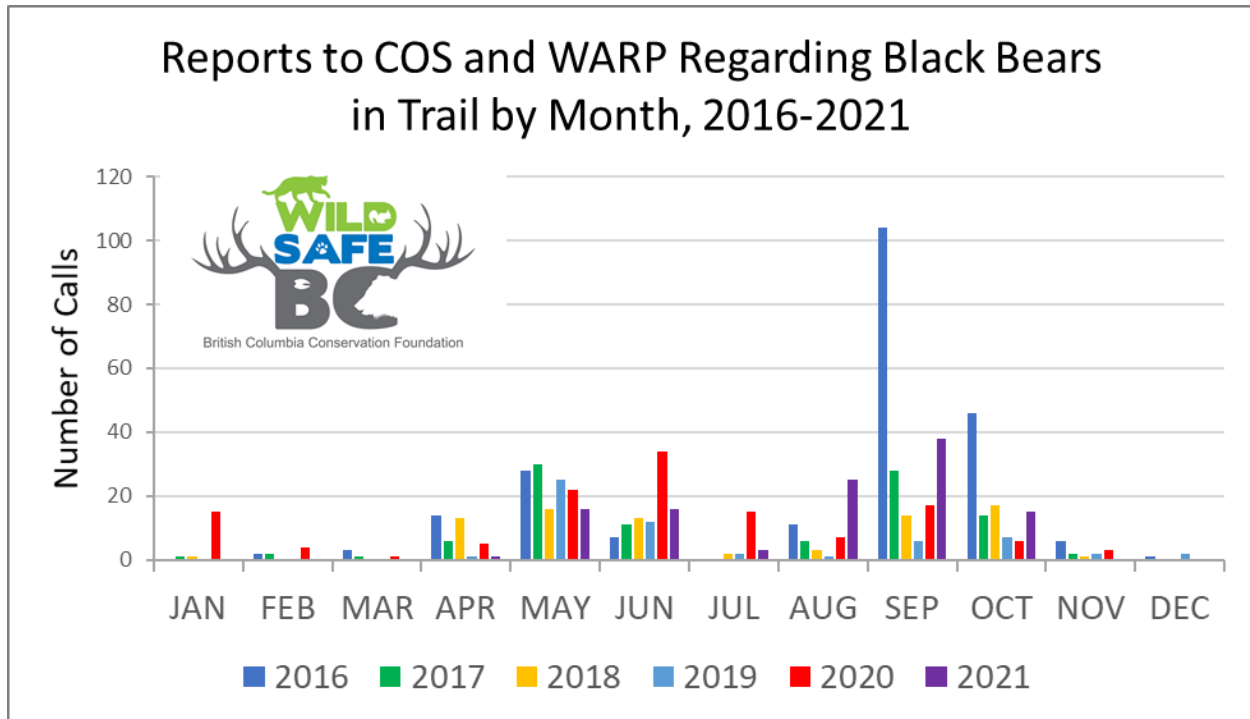


Figure 7. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears in Trail from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

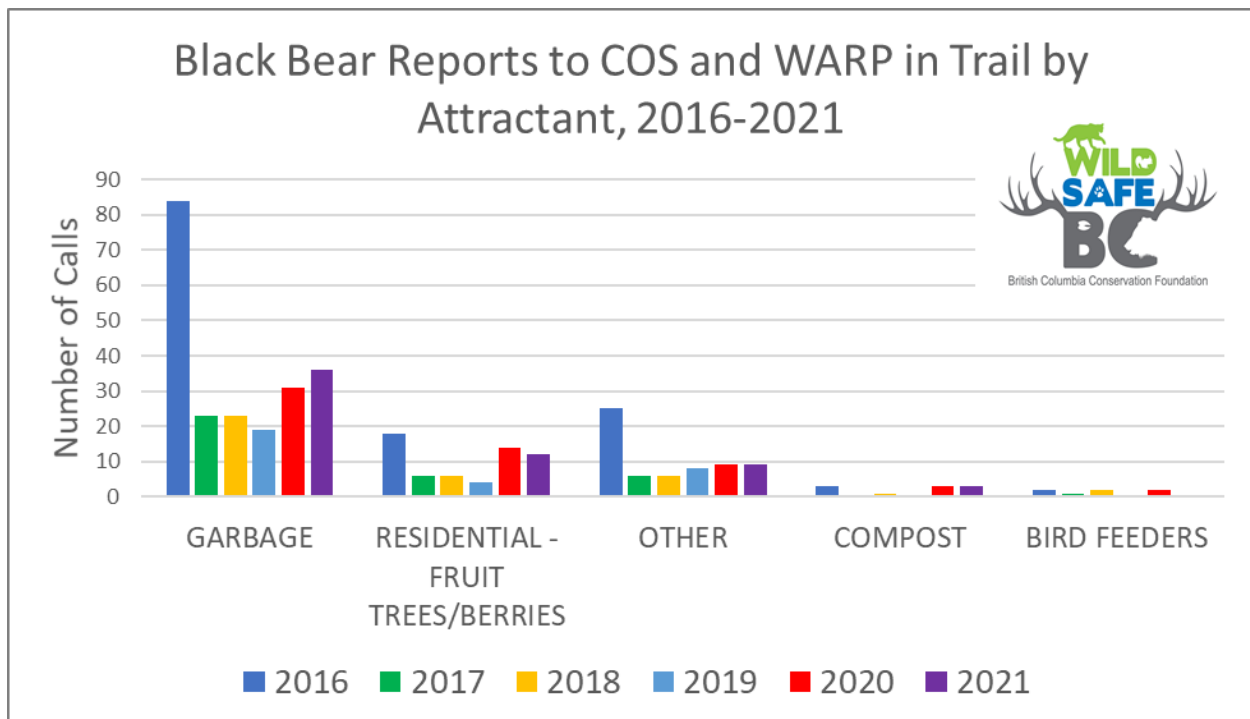


Figure 8. Reports to the COS and WARP by attractant in Trail from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of four schools, three summer camps and one other organization participated in the WRP (13 total presentations) through indoor and outdoor presentations that allowed for physical distancing. Over 250 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits in 2021 (Table 1).

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

| School/Organization | Date | Grade/Age | Students |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------|----------|
| Rossland Summit School | June 14, 2021 | Grade 7 | 30 |
| Camp Cowabunga | July 13, 2021 | Grades K-5 | 30 |
| Rossland Museum Camp | July 14, 2021 August 16, 2021 August 18, 2021 | Grades K-5 | 40 |
| City of Rossland Summer Camp | July 5, 2021 July 19, 2021 August 9, 2021 August 16, 2021 | Multiple Ages | 40 |
| Warfield Youth Action Network | Late July | Ages 10-14 | 10 |
| Ecole Sept Sommets School | October 8, 2021 | Grades K-3 | 22 |
| Webster Elementary School | November 17, 2021 | Kindergarten | 40 |
| Glenmerry Elementary School | November 19, 2021 | Grade 1 | 40 |

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave a total of five presentations through in-person presentations to 30 participants including Wildlife Safety and Awareness presentations and bear spray workshops (Table 2).

Table 2. Dates and number of participants for bear spray workshops and Wildlife Safety and Awareness Presentations in the Rossland - Trail region in 2021.

| Event | Date | Number of Participants |
|---|--------------------|------------------------|
| Bear Spray Workshop for Rossland Mudbunnies | July 14, 2021 | 8 |
| Kootenay Brain Injury Association Wildlife Safety and Awareness Presentation | August 11, 2021 | 6 |
| Bear Spray Workshop for Wetland Restoration team in Trail | September 15, 2021 | 6 |
| Trail Settlement Society Wildlife Safety and Awareness Presentation | October 7, 2021 | 8 |
| Rossland Bear Spray Workshop | November 6, 2021 | 2 |



Figure 9. The WCC presenting the inert bear spray demo in Rossland. Photo credit: Cora Skaien.

Display Booths

The WCC hosted eight booths at farmers' markets, trailheads, and local events in 2021, reaching 370 people (Table 3).

Table 3. Dates and number of attendees at display booths in the region in 2021.

| Event | Date | Number of Attendees |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Trail's IncrEdible Farmers' Market | June 5, 2021 | 55 |
| Rossland Farmers' Market | July 10, 2021 | 30 |
| Trail's IncrEdible Farmers' Market | July 17, 2021 | 30 |
| Trail's IncrEdible Farmers' Market | August 28, 2021 | 97 |
| Rossland Wednesday Market | September 1, 2021 | 30 |
| Trail's IncrEdible Farmers' Market | September 25, 2021 | 50 |
| Trail's IncrEdible Farmers' Market | October 24, 2021 | 60 |
| Rossland Trailhead Booth | November 6, 2021 | 18 |

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Through door-to-door education, a total of 123 people were reached during in-person conversations and 111 door hangers were left at homes. Areas were prioritized when there were recent wildlife issues.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. Within Rossland, only one bin was tagged over six outings and this bin was not subsequently seen out the night before collection. During approximately 10 outings throughout the season, less than 15 bins were tagged in some neighbourhoods in Trail. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviour is demonstrated by the fact that no bins were tagged from September onwards in the neighbourhoods in Trail where bins were tagged earlier in the season.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Columbia Valley page grew 16% in 2021 from 662 to 772 page followers and had 59 Facebook posts throughout the season. The WCC conducted a radio interview with BounceFM regarding attractant management in September.

Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife in Area signs were put up in areas with high levels of conflict, usually followed by door-to-door within the same neighbourhoods.

Collaborations

WildSafeBC Rossland/Trail continued its collaboration with the Conservation Office Service (COS), including regular discussions and joint efforts at identifying areas to focus on public education. There were also opportunities to collaborate with the WildSafeBC Castlegar program to jointly deliver bear spray workshops.

WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses good examples in their community on 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. A total of 2 businesses signed the pledge in 2021, including the Prestige Resort in Rossland and Clansey's in Rossland.

Special Initiatives

Rossland is currently interested in pursuing Bear Smart Community status, with intentions of having a Bear Hazard Assessment conducted in the spring of 2021. WildSafeBC and the Bear Smart Working Group in Rossland are collaborating on strategies to recommend to the City of

Rossland, including recommending more communal garbage receptacles. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe.”

Challenges and Opportunities

Key challenges throughout the year include low reporting of incidents to the Conservation Office Service, lack of access to affordable waste receptacles and inconsistent trash pick-up times. The Natural Control Alternatives Society manages communal public waste bins that residents in Rossland can dispose of their garbage in by donation (suggested \$5/bag), especially for those unable to be present on collection day or have excess garbage. These bins are often full, and at times misused by residents, despite the clear signage and efforts made by the Society. The inconsistent pick-up times for garbage results in garbage bins being left on the curb for long periods of time each morning, and many bears have learned that garbage will be present before noon on these days, leading to food-conditioned bears.

Another major issue in both Trail and Rossland is the improper securing of garbage between collection days. Many residents are now waiting until the morning of collection to put their garbage on the curb, but they are not necessarily keeping this attractant secure between garbage days. Education next year should focus on how to better manage garbage and other attractants on private property, and why this is important.

Fruit trees also continue to be a source of attractants in both Rossland and Trail that draw wildlife into residential areas. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community and would benefit to increased education and fruit gleaning activities. To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2022:

- Electric fence demonstrations
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media and news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots
- Seeking the creation of a local fruit-gleaning organization
- Recommendations for replacement of fruit-bearing trees with non-fruit and non-nut bearing trees on public property and private property for interested land-owners who do not harvest their fruit and nut trees

Within Rossland, there has been increased occurrences of bears breaking into resident’s homes. Education next year should continue to focus on how to address the root causes that lead to this behaviour, including food conditioning from garbage and fruit trees that are not sufficiently managed. Recommending that the public lock their doors can also help reduce the chances of bears entering homes.

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Rossland and Trail is grateful for the generous support the program receives from its funders including the Villages of Rossland and Trail, the Columbia Basin Trust, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF) and the Province of British Columbia. The WCC also

thanks the BCCF team and the local Conservation Office Service team for communication and shared knowledge of wildlife activity and advice.