

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

Selkirk Purcell

Prepared by: Ben Simoni and Rosie Wijenberg,

WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell Coordinators



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell Program between May 17th and Nov 30, 2021. The Selkirk Purcell area includes the Town of Creston, the Village of Salmo, the Lower Kootenay Band of the Ktunaxa First Nation and the Regional District of the Central Kootenay (RDCK) Areas A, B, C and G and the communities of Erickson, West Creston, Kootenay Bay, Riondel, Crawford Bay, Gray Creek, Boswell, Kuskanook, Wynndel, Canyon-Lister, Rykerts, Kitchener, Yahk, Kingsgate, Ymir and Nelway (Figure 1). The area includes 2 borders, 5 provincial parks and the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, a UNESCO world heritage wildlife management area. The WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell area operates on the traditional lands of the Ktunaxa, Sinixt and Syilx Peoples.

During the 2021 season, the majority of the human-wildlife conflicts involved black bears as a result of food conditioning. Food conditioning is a learned behaviour where bears associated people and their activities with sources of food. There were also some grizzly bear encounters involving livestock and a defensive response in a nature reserve. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed education 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:

- 20 WildSafe Ranger Presentations (WRP) and almost 400 youth reached
- 4 presentations given to community groups and 81 participants reached
- Almost 200 households received educational door hangers
- 5 bin tagging outings with 101 bins tagged; of those, 85% of bins tagged where not found out on the curb again.
- Over 400 people reached over 10 display booths
- 17 Facebook posts, and 85 new followers to the Selkirk Purcell Facebook page from January 1, 2021 to Nov 31, 2021
- 4 campgrounds were approached regarding the Bare Campsite Program and 2 of those expressed interest in moving forward
- 3 bear spray workshops were held in Salmo (1) and Creston (2)

Throughout the season, the WCC made site visits to properties upon request of community members or the Conservation Officer Service (COS). These community members appreciated the information and support of WildSafeBC. Many new residents to the area reached out the WCC for advice regarding recreating or living with wildlife and reducing or preventing conflict. Bear spray workshops and informative were very well received and initiated many conversations around best practices. The WCC collaborated with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions to host a workshop on grizzly bears and had 30 attendees. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

Some of the challenges this season included the extreme heat and smoke events that impacted delivery and attendance at some planned events. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic required modifications to delivery to reduce chances of transmission to follow Provincial Health Orders. Program coverage was also impacted by the early departure of the WCC but the season was

successfully completed by the Nelson WCC who was the Selkirk Purcell coordinator in 2019 and 2020.

WildSafeBC would like to thank the sponsors that made this season possible: the Town of Creston, the Province of British Columbia, the Regional District of Central Kootenay and the Columbia Basin Trust.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcells program coverage area.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2021 Season	4
Wildlife Activity	4
WildSafeBC COVID-19 Mitigation	5
WildSafe Ranger Program	6
Presentations to Community Groups	7
Display Booths	7
Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging	8
Social Media and Press	9
Wildlife in Area Signs	9
Collaborations	10
WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.....	10
Indigenous Awareness and Engagement.....	10
Challenges and Opportunities	10
Acknowledgements.....	11

Table of Figures

Figure 1. WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcells program coverage area.....	2
Figure 2. Year-over-year reports for all wildlife in from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021 in the Selkirk Purcell area.....	4
Figure 3. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP in the Selkirk-Purcells from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.....	5
Figure 4. Black bear reports by attractant to the COS and WARP in the Selkirk Purcells from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.....	5
Figure 5. The WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell Coordinator presenting to Canyon-Lister Elementary.....	6
Figure 6. The WCC giving a presentation in the Creston Community Complex, with physical distancing and masks.....	7
Figure 7. The WCC with a booth at the Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Centre.....	7
Figure 8. Garbage tags done within the Town of Creston.....	8
Figure 9. The WCC promoting an upcoming grizzly bear workshop at Juice FM.....	9
Figure 10. Bear-in-area signs.....	9

Cover Photo: The WCC enjoyed reaching out to community members of all ages at the Creston Valley Farmers' Market

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 Selkirk Purcells includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 30 2021. There were 89 black bear reports which slightly higher than the 3 year average of 85 (Figure 2). Cougar (n=2) and deer reports (n=36) were lower than average this year. Most deer activity is related to sightings and animal injuries including vehicle collisions. Grizzly bear reports (n=12) were close to average.

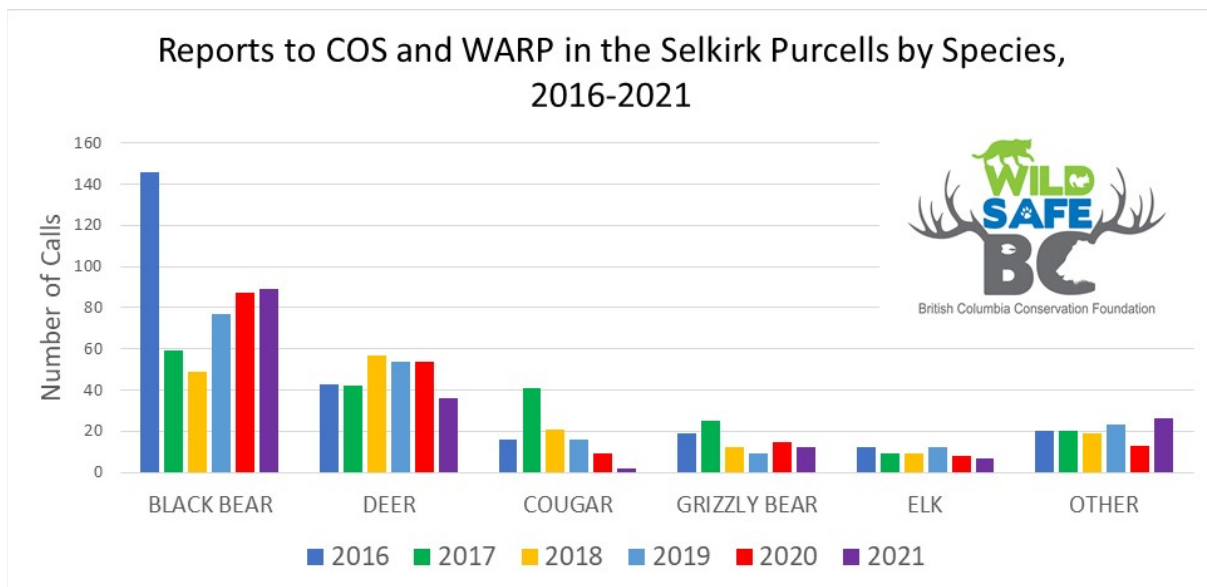


Figure 2. Year-over-year reports for all wildlife in from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021 in the Selkirk Purcell area.

Black bear reports peaked in September and October, likely as a result of natural food availability (Figure 3). The dry spring and hot weather, marked by many wildfires in the province, affected the quality and abundance of berries this season.

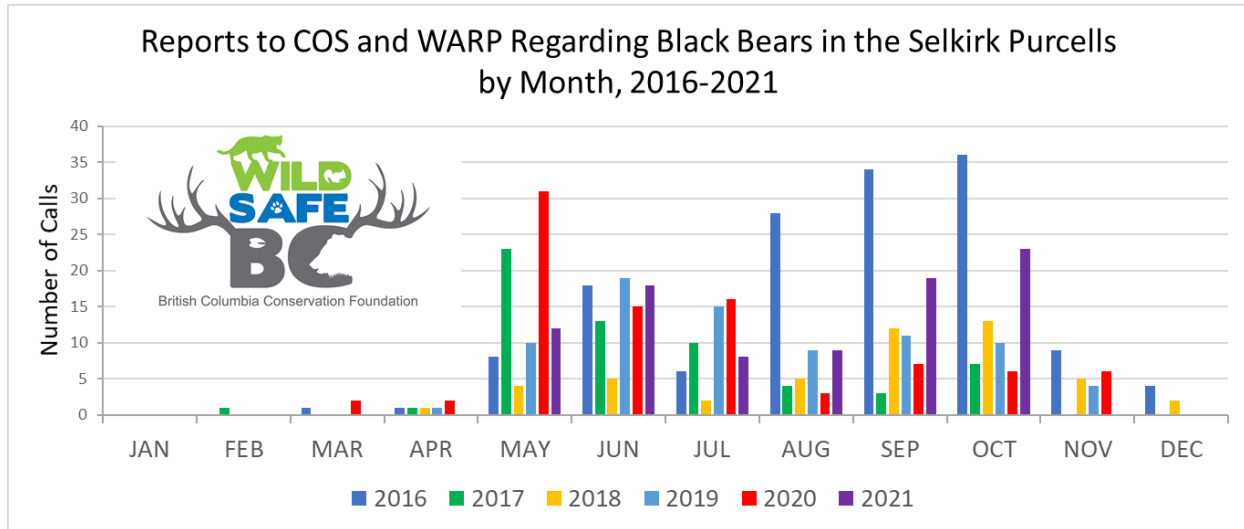


Figure 3. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP in the Selkirk-Purcells from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

Almost half of the reports (n=43) regarding black bears involved an unsecured attractant. Garbage remained the most reported (n=15) followed by fruit trees (n=7) and livestock (n=6) (Figure 4).

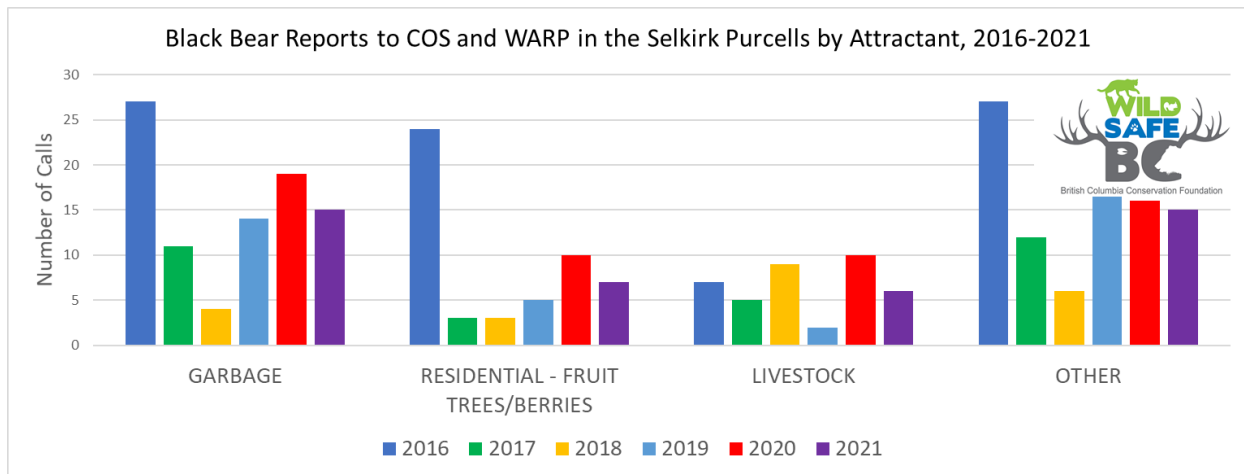


Figure 4. Black bear reports by attractant to the COS and WARP in the Selkirk Purcells from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

WildSafeBC COVID-19 Mitigation

All of the activities performed this season followed safety guidelines provided by the Province, WorkSafeBC and/or the BC Conservation Foundation’s Safety Coordinator. The WCCs were required to provide safety plans if they were organizing events where people would congregate. Wherever possible, in person activities were conducted outside. The WCCs worked closely with their local communities to ensure that all local requirements and restrictions were respected.

WildSafe Ranger Program



Figure 5. The WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell Coordinator presenting to Canyon-Lister Elementary.

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of five schools and three camps participated in the WRP through outdoor presentations that allowed for physical distancing. Almost 400 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits (Table 1).

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

School or Camp	Grade	Students
Salmo Elementary	K-3 (2 classes)	42
Adam Robertson Elementary	7 (2 classes)	48
Canyon Lister Elementary	K-5 (5 classes)	99
Erickson Elementary	K-4 (3 classes)	72
Yaqaan Nukiy Elementary	K-2 (3 classes)	63
Canyon-Lister Elementary	1, 2, 4, 5 (2 classes)	36
Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Centre Camp		25
Salmo Day Camp		27
RDCK Day Camp		23

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave a total of 4 presentations to over 80 participants including:

- Grizzly Bear Workshop with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions. This presentation had 30 participants and was held in the Creston Community Complex (Figure 6).
- A bear spray workshop held at KP park in Salmo, with four participants.
- A bear spray workshop at the Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Centre, which had five participants.
- A bear spray workshop at Millennium Park in Creston with 41 participants.



Figure 6. The WCC giving a presentation in the Creston Community Complex, with physical distancing and masks.

Display Booths

Display booths proved to be an excellent method for connecting with residents and helped build community relationships. The WCC attended 11 events with display booths this year reaching almost 400 people and creating community awareness (Table 2). Collaborations with local community groups such as the CVWMA Discovery centre help to raise awareness of local wildlife in a fun and informative way (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The WCC with a booth at the Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Centre

Table 2. Display booths attended and people reached.

Display Booth	Times attended	People reached
Creston Valley Farmers Market	5	263
Salmo Farmers Market	3	63
Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Centre	2	24
Wynndel Community Market	1	35

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education was modified this year to consist of leaving door hangers; the WCC did not knock on door as has been done in the past. Door-to-door hangers focused on the following: residences that left garbage out as identified during garbage tagging, attractant audits, areas identified by the COS, and areas that had reported wildlife in the area such as Wynndel and Bellmond Road outside of Salmo.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. During 5 outings, a total of 101 bins were tagged in the Town of Creston and 9 were repeat offenders. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours is demonstrated by the 85% 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 8).

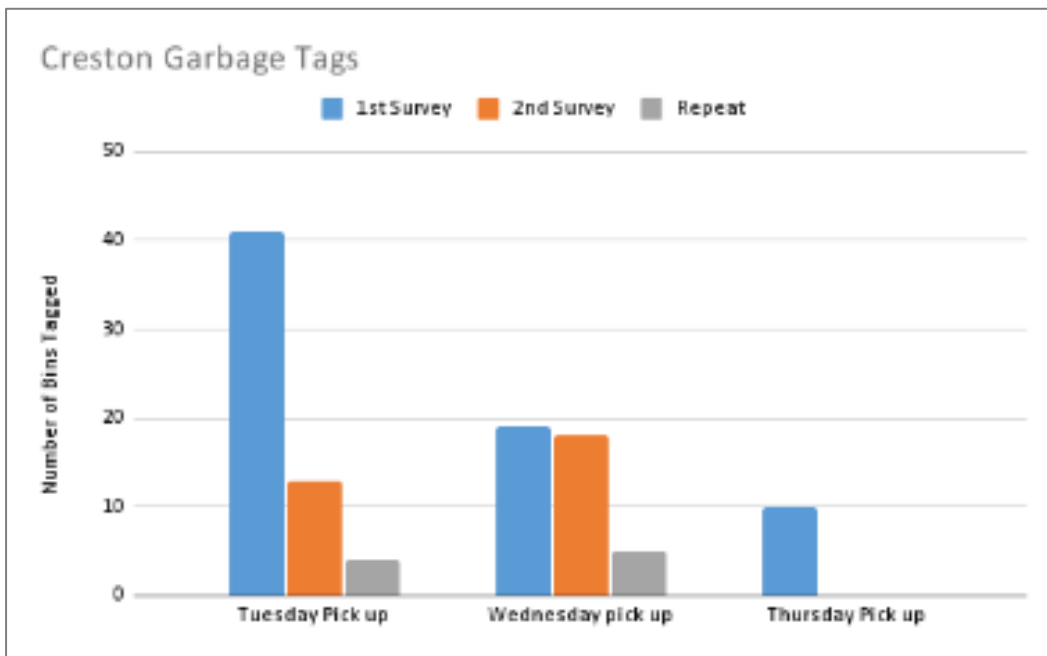


Figure 8. Garbage tags done within the Town of Creston.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell Facebook page grew 19% in 2020 from 358 to 443 page followers. The WCCs had over 30 posts to the page which were then shared to other local community pages. This helped spread WildSafeBC messaging on attractant management and safety in the area.

The WCC submitted several news articles to the Creston Valley Advance. The topics included announcing the start of the season and introducing the new coordinator, advertising for upcoming bear spray workshops, encouraging residents to manage their fruit trees and safety information on deer fawning season and the potential hazards associated with local deer populations. These articles were published both online and in print and were read widely throughout the area. Radio interviews were done several times with local radio station Juice FM covering a diverse array of topics while maintaining a core message of safety and attractant management (Figure 9).

WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell prepared and maintained a page on the Town of Creston's new online engagement website Let's Talk Creston. The Wildlife Education page on this site is managed by the WCC and includes frequently updated articles on safety, attractant management, events and local wildlife populations. It also offers an easy way for residents to contact the WCC.



Figure 9. The WCC promoting an upcoming grizzly bear workshop at Juice FM.

Wildlife in Area Signs

Bear In Area signs were distributed to residents experiencing bear activity in their neighbourhood and at trailheads with active bear sightings (Figure 10). As the Selkirk Purcell region is a geographically large and diverse area, targeting areas of high wildlife activity is key. The "wildlife in area" signs are excellent communication tools to achieve this goal.



Figure 10. Bear-in-area signs.

Collaborations

There were many organizations that worked with WildSafeBC in the Selkirk Purcell region. Specifically, the Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Centre was involved in collaborating on two WildSafe Ranger presentations and promoted and gave permission for two booths held on their property. The RDCK also hosted a WildSafe Ranger presentation. Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions collaborated on a successful bear spray demonstration in Creston. WildSafeBC also worked to publicize and promote the Creston Valley Food Action Coalition's fruit gleaning program.

WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

The WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program is a new initiative in 2020. Through the program, WildSafeBC is able to provide clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. Two Salmo area campsites began participating in the Bare Campsite program this year: Salmo River Ranch Campground (new to the area) and Rocking River Campground.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The Lower Kootenay Band of the Ktunaxa First Nation, locally known as Yaqan Nukiy were the original inhabitants of the Lower Kootenay area. Contact was made with the Band educators and the community office to obtain permission to incorporate Ktunaxa teachings, traditional ways of coexisting with wildlife and language into the WildSafe Rangers program and local displays. This work is just starting and will be an ongoing and collaborative process.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WCC adapted and was able to deliver a modified program safely and effectively. Improperly managed garbage and fruit continue to be the main sources of human-wildlife conflict in the Selkirk-Purcell area. To address these challenges, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2022:

- Continue education on attractant management and wildlife safety through door-to-door, presentations, display booths, social media, and the press.
- Engage businesses through the new WildSafe Business Pledge.
- Increase the use and acceptance of bear spray through bear spray workshops.
- Support campgrounds through the new WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.
- Continue to foster and build relationships with local groups that share common goals.

The Creston valley has an expanding and healthy grizzly bear population in the Creston flats. Human-based food sources provide food and attractants for grizzlies in the area. It is common for residents to have fruit trees and livestock. Electric fencing workshops would be beneficial for the area. There is an issue with dead stock disposal in the Creston flats, working with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions towards solutions could be beneficial.

It is also not culturally normal to carry bear spray when hiking around Creston. There was a report in July of someone getting bluff charged by a grizzly sow in the Creston wetlands (<https://www.crestonvalleyadvance.ca/news/wildlife-management-area-trail-closed-due-to-grizzly-bear-with-cubs/>). Continuing bear spray presentations will be beneficial for increasing community connections and sharing information and knowledge. There is considerable community interest in this service.

The Village of Salmo commonly will have reports about predators in the Village, specifically cougars and black bears. Some actions the Village could take to reduce the risk of wildlife entering the Village are to create a bylaw for when to put garbage out, make all garbage bins bear resistant, and remove abandoned fruit trees on public land.

Acknowledgements

The Selkirk-Purcell WildSafeBC Program would like to acknowledge the generous support it receives from its sponsors including the Province of British Columbia, the Columbia Basin Trust, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the City of Creston.

The WCC values the important support provided by Conservation Officer Curtis Haslehurst and staff at the town of Creston, including Ross Beddoes, Mike Moore and Adriana Snashall. We thank the following schools for their commitment to the WildSafe Ranger education program: Adam Roberston Elementary, Canyon-Lister Elementary, Yaqan Nukiy Elementary School, Erickson Elementary, Salmo Elementary. A special thanks to Carla Ahern of the Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Center for her support in bringing WildSafeBC to their summer programming and to Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions for collaborating on events and providing a valuable service to the area with her electric fencing expertise.

Finally, thank you to the Creston Advance Newspaper and 94.1 Juice FM Radio for promoting our WildSafeBC messaging to the community at large and helping us deliver our safety information to a wider audience.