

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

Qathet Regional District

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qathet
REGIONAL DISTRICT



Executive Summary

This report describes activities of the WildSafeBC qathet Regional District program between April 12 and November 30, 2021. For the seventh consecutive year, WildSafeBC has delivered programming to the coverage areas of Saltery Bay to Lund, including the City of Powell River, the Tla'amin First Nation's community and beyond into Desolation Sound. The qathet Regional District is located within the traditional territory of the Tla'amin, shíshálh, Klahoose, Homalco, and K'ómoks First Nations. The coverage area also includes the outer lying islands of Lasqueti, Texada and Savary (Figure 1). In total there are approximately 20,000 residents.

Reports to the Conservation Officer Services (COS) for 2021 were fairly similar yet, slightly lower than 2020. Overall calls were close to average from all other years since 2016. The reduction of human-wildlife reports this year is likely due to the abundance of natural food sources and also due to residents being at home less than in 2020, when more COVID-19 restrictions were in place. The Wildwood, Westview and Cranberry neighborhoods had the highest reports, with Townsite also having a significant number of reports. From January 1 to October 31, black bears remained the most reported species for a total of 170 reports, followed by deer at 51. Deer conflicts have reduced significantly this season compared to last which had 85 reports. There were several reports of grizzly bears at the Lois Lake Fish Farm and at recreation sites in the Powell River Community Forest. The top attractant for bears remains garbage, including a slightly rising number of reports once the new city garbage bins had been rolled out mid-October. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) believes that residential fruit and nut trees were a major attractant again this year and there is a concern that many conflicts and sightings of bears in residential areas go unreported. The qRD also saw a slight increase in the "Livestock" category as an attractant from 2020, making it the second-highest reported attractant after garbage. The WCC continues to educate on why early calls to the COS are important for the safety of wildlife and the community and to secure attractants by storing garbage indoors, using electric fencing to protect livestock and managing fruit trees.

This season's program presentation closely reflected that of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ever changing restrictions and mandates. WildSafeBC continued to offer the program safely and effectively. Outreach was put forth through social media, information booths, door-to-door canvassing by way of informative door hangers, in person presentations and through Zoom. The program has been widely accepted and recognized throughout the community and continues to increase public knowledge and inspire behavioural change around attractant management.

Program activities included four WildSafe Ranger presentations to 83 children; over 100 residents reached through door-to-door canvassing; and 10 display booths at trailheads and local businesses and the City of Powell River Night Market reaching 250 people. Other efforts to offer workshops such as a Bear Spray Workshop and Electric Fence Workshop had little to no registrants. Three campgrounds were contacted to take part in the Bare Campsite Program and Haywire Bay Campground will adopt the program next season. WildSafeBC also met with the City of Powell River to discuss the new garbage bin roll out and continues to offer support for further education and conflict reduction.

A big thank you to the qRD WildSafeBC program sponsors, the qathet Regional District, the City of Powell River, the Powell River Community Forest and the Province of British Columbia. The

program was also supported this year by volunteer Zoe Leech and with continuous, valuable support from COS Andrew Anaka, Dean Miller and Leyland Klassen.

Opportunities for the 2022 season and coming seasons would be to establish a Bear Working Group and ongoing implementation of Bear Smart Community criteria. The qRD would benefit greatly from bylaw amendments on waste management and wildlife attractants including storage, especially with the roll out of the new garbage bins. A bear-resistant bin and/or electric fence cost share program would allow residents in high conflict area to access mitigation measures.

Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe.

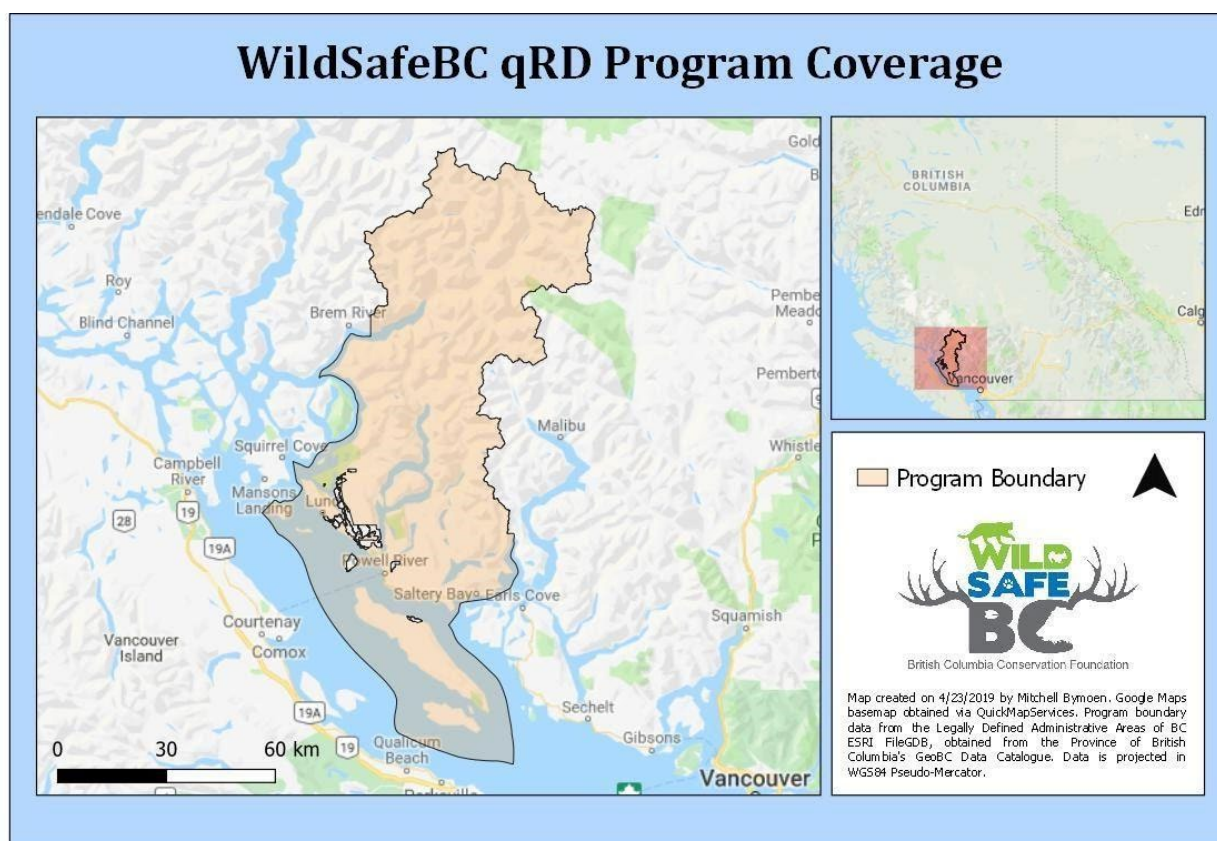


Figure 1. WildSafeBC qathet Regional District (qRD) Program coverage area.

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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) 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 program area (Figure 1) includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021 (Figure 2). It is important to keep in mind that many wildlife sightings and human-wildlife conflict go unreported and the figures below do not represent all conflict in the community.

There were 170 black bear reports which is just below the three year average of 220. Grizzly bear activity was also higher than average with reports of two juvenile grizzlies around the Lois Lake Fish Farm and Powell Forest Recreation Sites however, many of these reports were not captured in the WARP data. Deer remain the second-most reported species at 51 which is slightly lower than the 5-year average of 57. Both cougar (n=9) and wolf (n=2) reports were low.

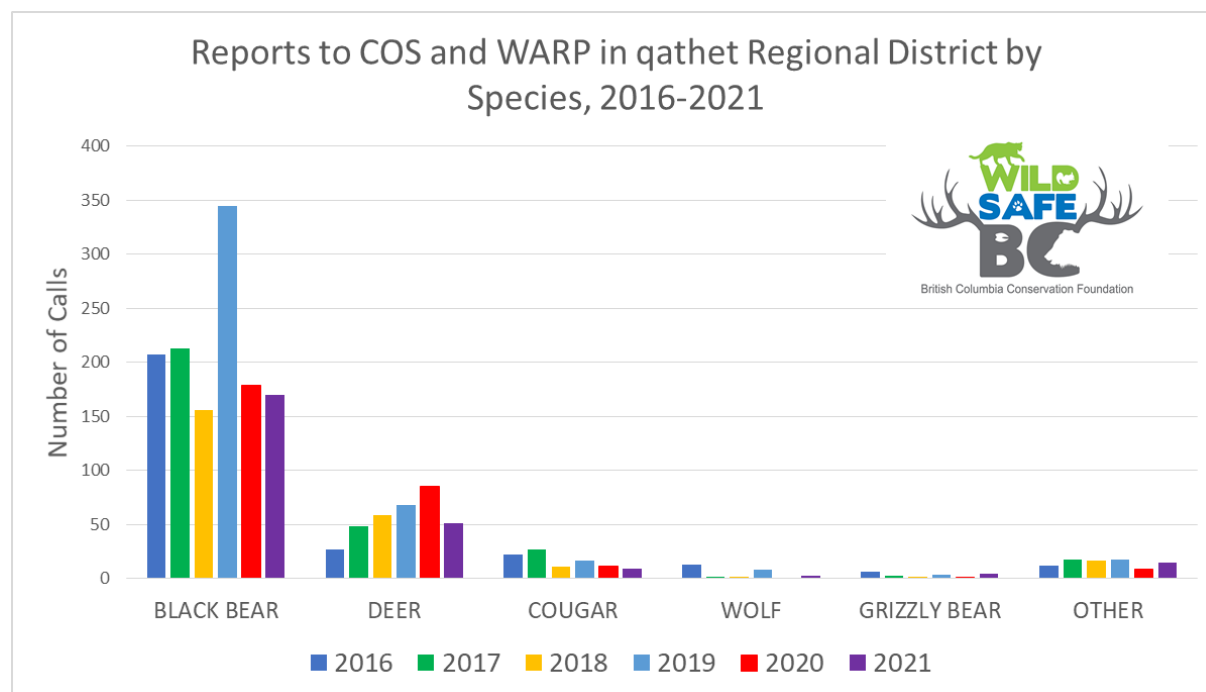


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to October 31st, 2021.

Spring was the busiest season for black bear activity this year with a relatively quiet summer and another slight uptick in September and October (Figure 3). However, the abundance of natural foods likely helped reduce the number of conflicts this season.

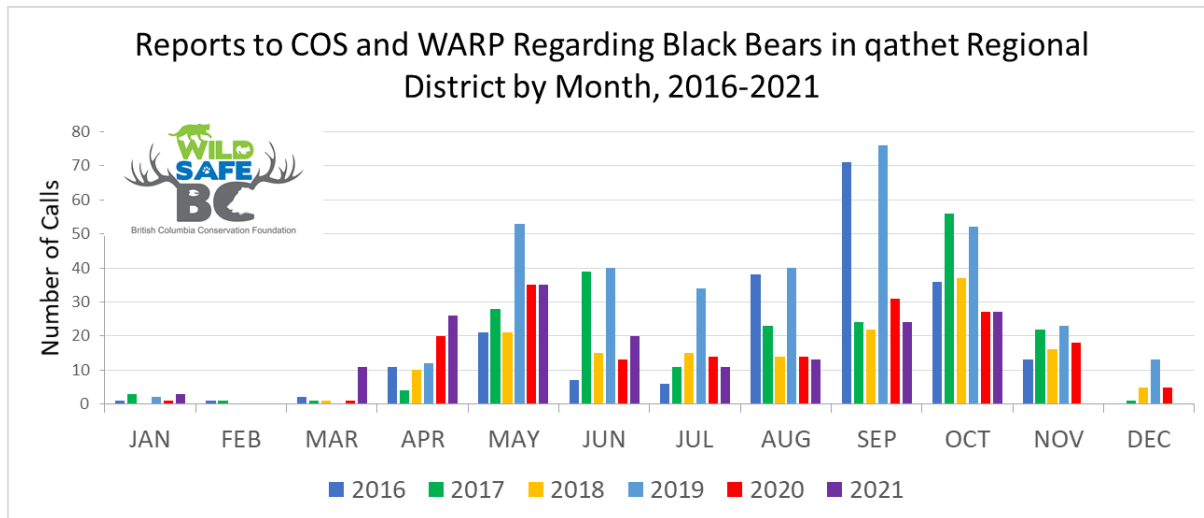


Figure 3. Reports by month to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to October 31st, 2021.

Unfortunately, black bears continue to access a variety of non-natural food sources in the region with garbage being the most reported and connected to 39 of the reports (Figure 4). Livestock reports are also high at 17. Based on conversations with residents, it is likely that fruit trees are underreported as an attractant as it is mistakenly believed to be a natural food source. The abundance of unpicked fruit trees is leading to conflict as this is considered a gateway food. Bears are drawn into communities by unpicked fruit which teaches them to forage near people for high calorie food rewards. When the fruit wanes, these human-habituated bears then turn to other potential food sources like garbage, compost, bird seed in feeders, freezers stored outside, barbeque grease and small livestock such as chickens and beehives. This results in the lethal removal of bears throughout BC.

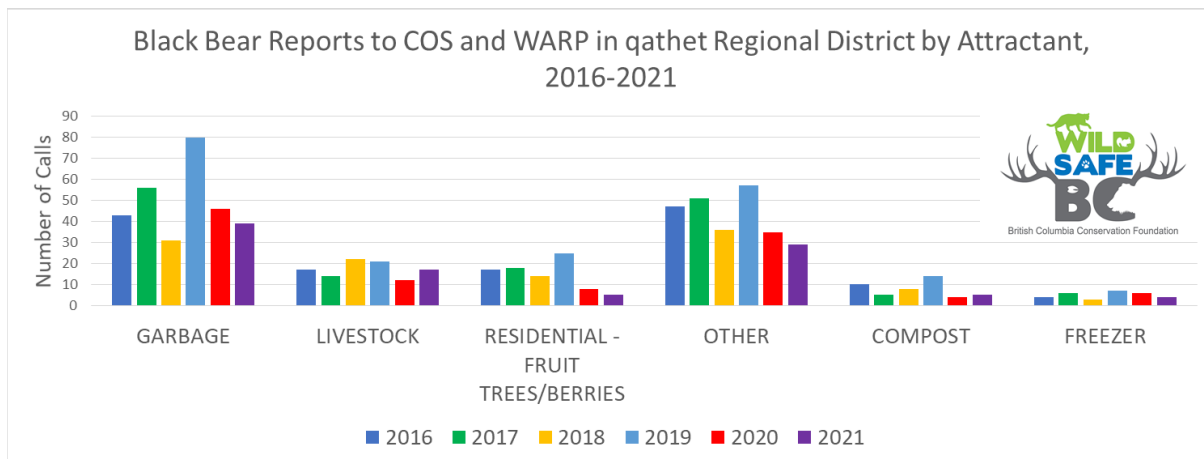


Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears and attractants involved when an attractant is noted, from January 1, 2016 to October 31st, 2021.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of four WRP were presented through webinars, outdoor presentations and indoor presentations that allowed for physical distancing. Over 80 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits (Table 1).

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

School	Grade	Students
PR Girl Guides	Mixed ages	12
Tla'amin	1	2
Partners In Education	Mixed ages	50
Kelly Creek	Kindergarten	19

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave a Wildlife Awareness and Safety Presentation by way of outdoor presentation to over a dozen participants at Coast Mountain Academy.

Display Booths

Over the season the WCC held 10 display booths around town including at trailheads, local businesses and the City of Powell River Thursday Night Markets. In total the display booths reached 250 people.



Figure 5. WildSafeBC booth held at the Powell River Visitor Centre.

Door-to-Door Education

Door-to-door education was modified this year to consist of leaving door hangers; the WCC did not knock on doors as has been done in the past. If the resident was in their yard or clearly visible from their door, the WCC would have a more in depth conversation.

Through door-to-door education, a total of 105 people were reached with door hangers. The WCC prioritized neighborhoods suggested by the local COS.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC qRD page grew to over 900 page followers. The WCC submitted a news article to the Lund Barnacle and had several mentions in the Powell River Peak and Powell River Living through Let's Talk Trash and Skookum Gleaners about the managing attractants. These articles lead to a small increase in program presentation opportunities.

Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife-in-Area signs are placed in wildlife activity hotspots to alert people in the area to take precautions. While trail users should always be prepared to encounter wildlife by carrying bear spray and keeping pets under control, adding signage to areas brings increased awareness. Used in neighbourhoods, the goal is to encourage residents to make efforts to secure attractants.



Figure 6. Bear-in-Area trailhead signage encourage users to take precautions on the trails.

Collaborations

This season the WCC strengthened the collaboration efforts with the Tla'amin Nation, Skookum Gleaners and the Powell River Farmers' Market. Awareness collaboration also played a large part in this season regarding juvenile grizzly cubs in our District. The WCC worked with Mitchell Canoes and Kayaks and Rec Sites and Trails BC to inform the public of grizzlies in the area.

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. There are several private campgrounds in the area and the qathet Regional District operates a campground at Haywire Bay. The WCC reached out to several of these campgrounds to introduce the program.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC worked on collaboration efforts with the Tla'amin nation by offering a WildSafe Rangers and Wildlife Awareness and Safety Presentation through collaboration of the Nehmotl Newsletter. Future efforts to continue collaboration are invited, including for a Tla'amin representative to sit on a Bear Smart Working Group.

Special Initiatives

The City of Powell River and Waste Management rolled out a new garbage bin program to work with a new automated garbage collection truck. WildSafeBC worked closely regarding messaging to residents regarding the new bins and how to reduce attracting wildlife. The WCC continues to support the efforts of the City to educate residents on the new bins by way of social media posts and consultation.

Challenges and Opportunities

A challenge the program experienced this year was a lack of pre-registration for workshops. Due to COVID-19 regulations, pre-registration was suggested to better establish maximum participants and social distancing measures. This resulted in little to no registration, causing the workshops not to run.

An opportunity in the future would be to work more closely with partners and collaboration partnerships to better increase the exposure of workshops in our District. This would include exposure to workshops such as electric fencing and bear spray workshops. Further opportunities to collaborate with Skookum Gleaners would also be beneficial regarding the education on fruit and nut gleanings in our community.

Uptake by schools of the WildSafe Ranger program was also impacted by the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Reaching more youth in 2022 should be another priority for the program.

Securing attractants continues to be an ongoing challenge in many parts of the region and there would be a benefit to establishing a Bear Working Group and implementing aspects of the [Bear Smart Community](#) program which has been shown to be effective at reducing human-bear conflicts.

Initiatives such as the Business Pledge and Bare Campsite Program should be revisited in 2022 as well as attendance at community events and markets. Promoting electric fencing for those with small urban livestock and beehives should continue to be a priority. A wildlife landing page on the City of Powell River's website would be an ideal location to share local best practices and solutions for community residents. As compost remains a strong attractant for bears, connecting with local gardening groups should also be a priority for 2022. Cost-share programs that reduce the burden on residents for accessing electric fencing or bear-resistant containers should be explored as a pilot program if funding can be secured.

Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC qathet Regional District program would not be possible without the generous funding from the Province of British Columbia, the BC Conservation Foundation, the qathet Regional District, and the City of Powell River through the Powell River Community Forest fund. A special thank you to the qRD Manager of Operational Services, Patrick Devereaux, for his ongoing support.

Thank you to the British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF) team for their training, resources and support throughout the season. WildSafeBC qRD is very thankful to have the support of the local Conservation Officers, Andrew Anaka, Dean Miller and Leyland Klassen, who have provided advice and support in so many ways this season. Local businesses and organizations helped to make this season possible by promotion, collaboration and support for the program. These included: Skookum Gleaners, Let's Talk Trash, Tourism Powell River, Mitchell's Canoe and Kayak, Rec Sites and Trails BC, TAWS bike garage and Powell River Outdoors. An extra thank you to volunteer, Zoe Leech who spent several evenings assisting at the City of Powell River Thursday Night Markets.