

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

## Castlegar and Area

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CASTLEGAR

## Executive Summary

This report describes the activities, highlights and challenges of the WildSafeBC Castlegar Program between May 1 and November 30, 2021. The program area includes the City of Castlegar and the communities located in Areas I and J within the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) (Figure 1). WildSafeBC would like to acknowledge that Castlegar and the surrounding area are located on traditional territories of the Sinixt Nation.

In 2021, in Castlegar and the surrounding area, there were 218 black bear reports which far exceeded any other species reports to the Conservation Officer Services (COS). The number of black bear reports was also the highest in five years. Other species reports included deer, elk, cougar, grizzly, and coyotes.

The main goal of the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) is to assist communities in preventing conflicts through several educational programs and collaborations with the City of Castlegar and the Conservation Officer Services (COS). In the 2021, several program modifications were implemented in order to follow COVID-19 safety precautions. The following WSBC activities were completed by the WCC, along with the WCC from New Denver-Nakusp, with the program coverage area:

- There were 9 WildSafe Ranger presentations for 185 children.
- A total of 7 Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray presentations for 69 people.
- An electric fencing presentation was given to the Pass Creek Neighbourhood Association in collaboration with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions.
- A total of 527 brochures or door hangers were distributed through canvassing.
- Bin tagging took place over 33 nights in 4 different areas within the City of Castlegar.
- There were 7 display booths reaching over 450 people
- The WCC encouraged 7 businesses to take the WildSafeBC Pledge
- The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page grew from 687 to 721 followers.
- The WCC worked with Pass Creek Campground to initiate the Bare Campsite Program
- Wildlife in Area signs were rotated through 21 different locations.
- In collaboration with the Kootenay Food Strategy Society (KFSS), "Pick Me, Please" signs were erected by the WCC on residential property to encourage people to harvest fruit to prevent food waste and prevent human-wildlife conflicts.
- Permanent bear safety signage was installed at Merry Creek bike trails.
- In collaboration with the City of Castlegar, 5 apple trees located directly next to popular walking trails were removed from Millennium Park.
- The WCC initiated relationships with local greenhouses for a future discounted rate on non-fruiting trees for those that replace their fruit or nut trees.
- The WCC provided information and encouraged Home Hardware to commit to carry bear resistant garbage carts in their stores in spring 2022.

The WCC would like to thank the City of Castlegar, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the Province of BC, the RDCK, and the Columbia Basin Trust for their support of this program. Special thanks to Cora Skaen, the WCC from New Denver-Nakusp for providing additional delivery in the area. The WCCs would also like to thank the residents of Castlegar for their support and interest in keeping wildlife wild and communities safe by managing attractants that lead to food-conditioned animals.

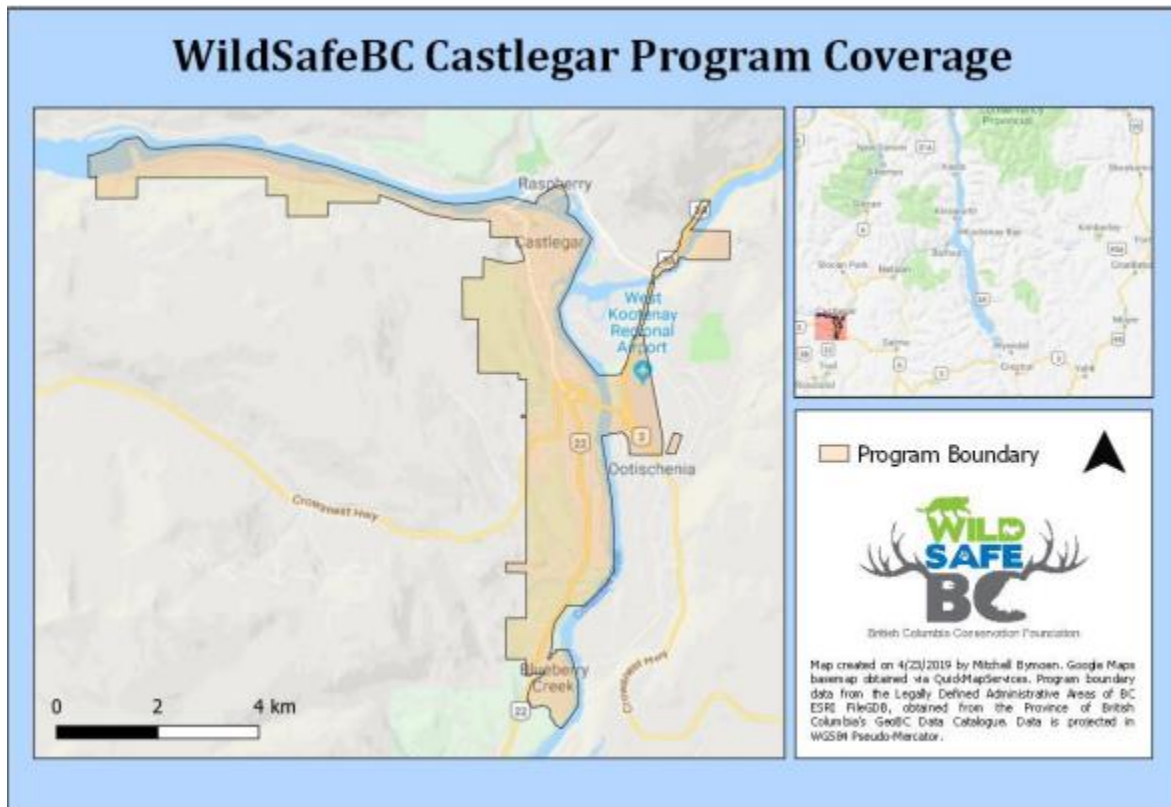


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Castlegar Program Coverage Area.

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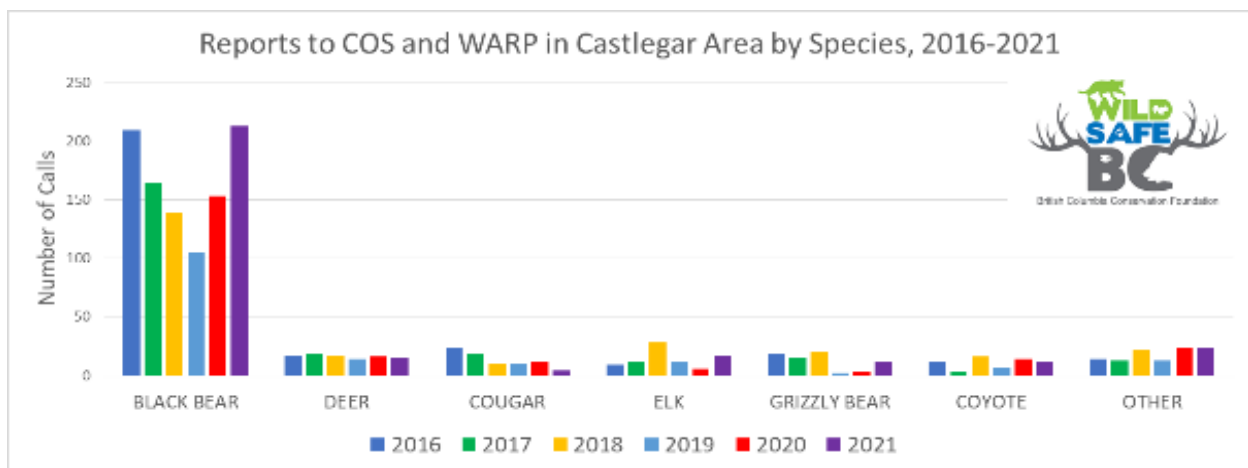
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## Highlights from the 2021 Season

### Wildlife Activity

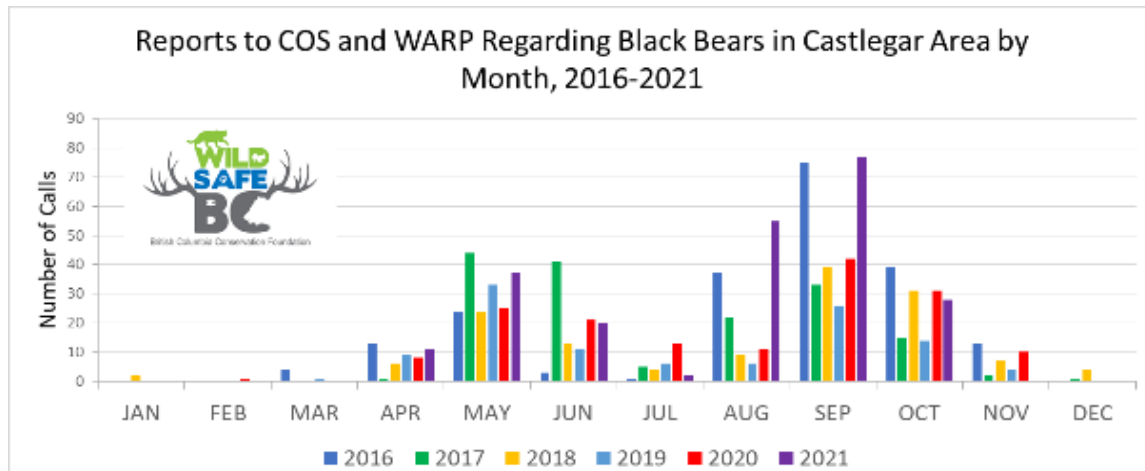
Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) and the online form (<https://forms.gov.bc.ca/environment/rapp/>) are available to the public through WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) on the WildSafeBC website. This data is updated daily and this report for Castlegar and area includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

There were 218 black bear wildlife reports which far exceeded any other species in Castlegar in 2021 (Figure 2). There were an additional 10 reports of grizzly bears in Genelle and Ootischenia immediately outside Castlegar. Elk reports rose from the past two years, mostly in the Ootischenia neighbourhood. Deer and coyote reports have remained fairly consistent over the past few years, while cougar reports have decreased overall (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Wildlife reports to the Conservation Officer Service by species from Jan 1, 2016 to Oct 31, 2021.**

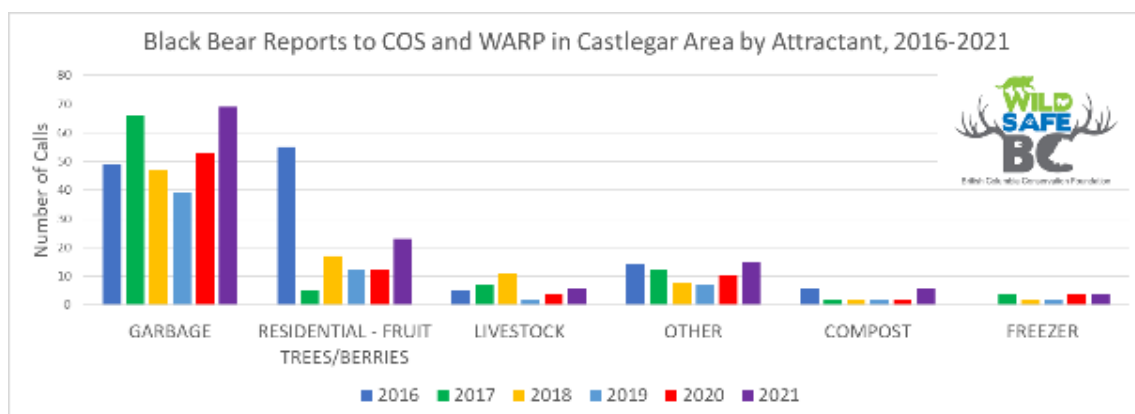
There is a trend of increases in bear reports in the month of May and September over the past 5 years (Figure 3). A poor berry crop resulting from hot and dry summer conditions, may have been the cause of a greater number of reports in September compared to past years (Figure 3). It was suspected that multiple reports came from a few individual bears returning to the neighbourhoods of Kinniard, the northeast corner of the downtown, Zinio Park, Schulte Crescent in Blueberry, Millennium Park, Zuckerberg Island, and the hospital



**Figure 3. Black bear reports to the Conservation Officer Service by month from Jan 1, 2016 – Oct 31, 2021**

Garbage continues to be the most reported attractant for black bears in Castlegar, creating habituated bears (Figure 4). There were two bears euthanized within Castlegar city limits and several more outside city limits by the CO service. Residential garbage reports are greater than reports from businesses. It is suspected that many residents are reluctant to report instances when bears access garbage due to fear that the bear will be harmed. Reporting to the CO service needs to be encouraged. Organics collection service is set to begin as soon as 2022, which will hopefully decrease the number of bear reports associated with garbage.

Wildlife Alert Reports for residential fruit trees appears minimal, however the WCC received over 20 calls from residents concerned about black bears in their neighbourhood due to fruit and nut trees (Figure 4). There is a reluctance by the public to recognize fruit as an attractant that leads to conflict. Unlike garbage, fruit is perceived as a healthy form of calories while disregarding the fact that a bear has been encouraged to forage among densely populated areas. Once the fruit wanes, these food-conditioned and human-habituated bears may then turn to other sources of nearby food such as garbage.



**Figure 3. Black bear reports to the Conservation Officer Service in the Castlegar area by attractant 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.

## Display Booths

WildSafeBC held a regular booth at the Castlegar Farmers' Market engaging with a total of 425 people (Figure 5; Table 1). Half of these events were attended by a representative from the COS as well. Two booths were held at Merry Creek trails parking area and one at Dove Hill.



Figure 5. Castlegar Farmers' Market and Merry Creek booth set up with collaboration with COS, 2021.

Table 1. WildSafeBC display booths in Castlegar, 2021.

Venue	Date	# of Participants
Castlegar Farmer's Market	May 29	65
Castlegar Farmer's Market	June 19	82
Castlegar Farmer's Market	July 17	76
Castlegar Farmer's Market	August 7	90
Castlegar Farmer's Market	August 28	112
<b>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</b>		<b>425</b>

## WildSafeBC Ranger Program

The WildSafeBC Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflicts and what they can do to stay safe and secure wildlife attractants around the home. The WCC hosted a WRP presentation for the Castlegar Summer Reading Club as well as 8 classes ranging from grade 1 to 7 at Kinnaird Elementary, Twin Rivers / Castlegar Primary, Robson Community School, and Children's Orchard Pre-School (Table 2; Figure 6).

Table 2. Castlegar Farmer's Market booth set up with collaboration with CO service, 2021.

Schools/Organizations	Grade	# of Students
<b>Castlegar Public Library Summer Reading Program</b>	Pre-school /Grade 1	20
<b>Kinnaird Elementary</b>	Grade 1	21
<b>Kinnaird Elementary</b>	Grade 7	24
<b>Twin Rivers / Castlegar Primary School</b>	Grade 4/5	21
<b>Twin Rivers / Castlegar Primary School</b>	Grade 5/6	22
<b>Robson Community School</b>	Grade 5/6	21
<b>Robson Community School</b>	Grade 1/2	20
<b>Robson Community School</b>	Grade 2/3	22
<b>Children's Orchards Pre-School</b>	Age 3-5	15
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>185</b>



Figure 6. WildSafe Ranger presentation to Summer Reading Club, Castlegar, 2021.

## Presentations to Community Groups

### Wildlife Awareness

The WCC was a guest speaker for an international nursing class at Selkirk College. The class was held digitally with 18 students from around the world that would soon be making their way to the Castlegar campus. This presentation was also offered and advertised to the Castlegar Literacy Group, but was cancelled due to a low number of registrations.

### Electric Fencing

An electric fencing workshop took place in the rural community of Pass Creek in collaboration with Gillian Sanders from Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions (Figure 7). There were nine people in attendance.





Figure 7. Pass Creek electric fencing workshop with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions, 2021.

## Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray Workshops

A total of seven bear spray workshops took place in Castlegar with a total of 69 participants.

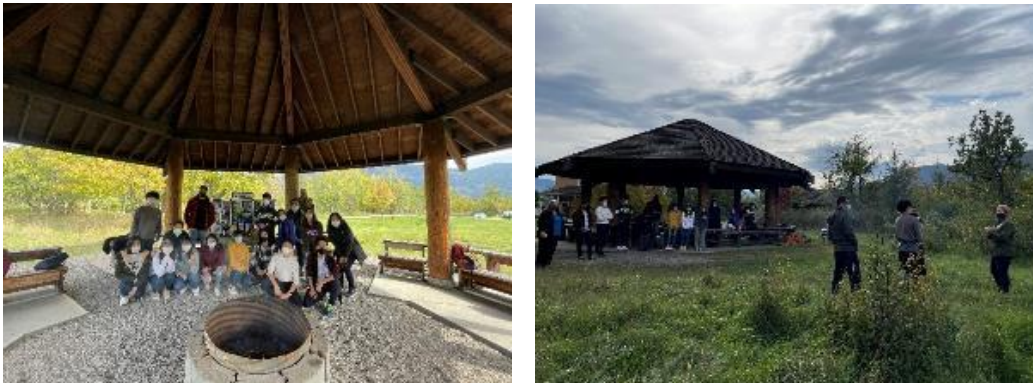


Figure 4. Bear Spray workshop for Selkirk College international students, Castlegar, 2021.

Table 1. Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray Workshops hosted in Castlegar, 2021.

Group	Venue	#	Date
<b>Native Plant Council of Columbia Basin</b>	Millennium Park	7	June 17
<b>The Marten Family</b>	Robson	5	June 18
<b>The Mudbunnies Mountain Bike group</b>	Rossland	12	July 14
<b>Castlegar Search and Rescue</b>	Search and Rescue Hall	8	Aug 25
<b>Castlegar Parks and Trails Society</b>	Merry Creek Trail Head	9	Aug 31
<b>Castlegar Parks and Trails Society</b>	Merry Creek Trail Head	10	Sept 8
<b>Selkirk College International Students</b>	Selkirk College	18	Oct 5
<b>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</b>		<b>69</b>	

## BC Goes Wild

BC Goes Wild is a campaign to celebrate wildlife in BC and it occurs in September which is typically the month when human-bear conflicts are at their highest in BC. The BC Goes Wild event was a free bear spray workshop advertised to the general public with ten people in attendance (Figure 9).



Figure 5. BC Goes Wild public bear spray workshop in Castlegar, 2021.


## Door-to-Door Education

Door-to-door education was modified this year. Instead of knocking on doors and talking to people, door hangers and brochures were distributed. If residents were outside when the WCC was going door-to-door, the WCC would speak with the residents while maintaining physical distance. If unsecured or unmanaged attractants were seen on a property, the WCC knocked at a residence then immediately stood back two meters for a personal discussion outside the door.

Over 500 door hangers or Black Bear brochures with personalized letters were delivered to residents within and outside of Castlegar city limits (Table 4). Black bear safety information was developed and included in the quarterly utility bill sent to every property owner within Castlegar (Figure 10). Other species brochures delivered were raccoons, rats and one coyote.

Table 2. Brochures and neighbourhood letters distributed in Castlegar and Area, 2021.

Species	# of Brochures/Door Hangers	Locations Delivered
<b>Black Bear</b>	All Castlegar Residents	City of Castlegar
<b>Black Bear</b>	381	Arrow Lake Drive area (94), Crescent Street, 1 <sup>st</sup> St (76), 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> , and 4 <sup>th</sup> Ave (35), Area surrounding Stanley Humphries School, Zinio Park (42), the Hospital and Rota Villa (63), Schulte Crescent in Blueberry (15), 21 <sup>st</sup> St and 8 <sup>th</sup> Ave (12), area around Kinniard School (14), Silverwood Cres & Ridgwood Dr (30)
<b>Black Bear</b>	122	Ootischenia (Bridgeview Road), Genelle (Whispering Pines, 16 <sup>th</sup> & 17 <sup>th</sup> Ave)
<b>Raccoon</b>	6	10 <sup>th</sup> Ave on the west side of Columbia Ave
<b>Rats</b>	18	7 <sup>th</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup> Ave between 1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street
<b>Total Brochures</b>	<b>527</b>	



**BE SMART**  
**Be Bear Aware**  
Let's keep wildlife wild and people safe

### Bear Control Tips

#### Your Garbage Cart

- **Lock and store carts** in a secure building between collection.
- **Carts left outside must have both clips locked and be chained to a strong railing**, post or tree at all times between collection. It is much more difficult for bears to break into a cart if it is fixed upright.
- **Only place carts on the curb with clips unlocked between 4 a.m. to 7 a.m. on collection day.** Fines of up to \$200 may be issued for carts placed on the curb outside of collection windows.
- If your cart or clips are damaged contact the City.

#### Reduce Odors


- **Freeze especially smelly food items** and add them to your cart on collection day (i.e. meat, bones, rotten fruit, etc).
- **Take additional garbage to community bins or the landfill** rather than overflowing your personal cart.
- **Clean your cart regularly** and consider adding ¼ cup baking soda and ¼ cup of borax to absorb odors.
- Secure and **manage your backyard compost carefully** by adding small amounts at a time and disposing of cooked food, meat, or dairy products in your garbage.

#### Prevent Other Attractants

- **Pick all domestic fruit and nuts as they ripen** and do not allow fallen fruit or nuts to accumulate beneath trees.
- Avoid leaving pet food unattended outside and consider taking bird feeders down until the winter.

### Bear Smart Community Dumpster Pilot Project

The City now has two communal bear-proof garbage bins for public use. The bins are part of a pilot project intended to minimize human-bear conflict by giving residents an option for overflowing garbage or for those who cannot keep their cart inaccessible to wildlife between collection. The dumpsters are bear-resistant with self-latching lids that only allow for small bags of household waste to be disposed.



**Bins accessible anytime at:**  
**Pioneer Arena**  
925 Columbia Avenue  
**Castlegar Industrial Park**  
4500 Minto Road  
(road going to Civic Works)

### Report human-wildlife conflicts to the RAPP line at 1 877 952 7277 or #7277 on the TELUS Mobility Network

Like @WildSafeBCCastlegar on Facebook to follow local wildlife sightings and learn about how to reduce conflicts.

Visit [wildsafebc.com](http://wildsafebc.com) for more information or contact your local coordinator at [castlegar@wildsafebc.com](mailto:castlegar@wildsafebc.com) | 250 365 8971

Figure 6. Bear aware information included in the quarterly utility bill, Castlegar, 2021.

## Garbage Tagging

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the night before collection. During 33 outings throughout Castlegar, a total of 292 bins were tagged in the City of Castlegar. Of these, 35 residents received a sticker more than once. There were 65 garbage carts tagged on the first session, with an average of 31 carts tagged during the remaining sessions indicating the effectiveness of bin tagging program. The downtown area consistently had the greatest number of bins placed on the curb the night before collection over the bear season. During the first tagging session, there were 32 garbage carts tagged, which reduced to an average of 13 carts during the remaining 8 sessions. There were also 2 nights of commercial dumpster checks of food related businesses completed with an average of 25 dumpsters found unlocked or open each night.



## Community Dumpster Pilot Project

WildSafeBC and the City of Castlegar collaborated to initiate a community dumpster pilot project for the 2021 summer season. Waste Management provided two bear proof dumpsters located at the Pioneer Arena and at the end of Minto Road behind Trowalex (Figure 11). The City began with a weekly collection schedule and due to consistent overloading of dumpsters, increased the collection service to three times per week (Figure 11). Due to consistent dumpster overloading, the program was cancelled and the dumpsters were taken away on September 30, 2021.



Figure 7. Community dumpsters being used inappropriately resulting in their removal.

## WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

The WildSafeBC Coordinator approached the Pass Creek Campground host and manager to discuss the benefits of the BARE Campground Program early in the season. She expressed that she didn't feel they needed the program at that time. Later in the summer, the Pass Creek Campground began experiencing issues with a bear that had accessed food from one of the campsites. The WildSafeBC Coordinator re-visited the campground at this time and the manager was very receptive. The campground accepted the BARE Campground Program materials (posters, site check slips, brochures), accepted training, and insisted they would follow the recommendations of WildSafeBC and the COS. The campground really liked the idea of obtaining a signature from campers upon arrival, accepting the rules of the campground, but expressed they needed to present this to the campground owners and RDCK before adopting the process. This was also the case for website and infrastructure changes.

## WildSafeBC Business Pledge

The WCC approached 10 businesses in Castlegar about the WildSafeBC Business Pledge, 7 of which were willing to sign up. These included the Castlegar ReStore, Home Hardware, Tailout Brewing, Maggie's Mug, The Blue Barn, Common Grounds, and Chef's Plate. Their commitment to the program was highlighted through social media on the WildSafeBC provincial accounts (Figure 12). Recommendations were made to Maggie's Mug, Common Grounds, and Chef's Plate to improve their waste storage systems.



Figure 8. WildSafe Business Pledge participants highlighted in social media.

The WCC approached Home Hardware and Mitchell's Hardware about interest in carrying bear-resistant garbage carts for residents living outside of the City of Castlegar. Both businesses have expressed interest, and Home Hardware has committed to purchasing these carts in spring 2022.

## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page has been an effective way to reach residents, although there was minimal engagement on posts. Some of the most popular posts were about coyotes, fruit picking, business pledges, resident highlights, as well as upcoming workshops. One post that received a fair amount of negative attention was centered around the removal of fruit trees next to popular trails in Millennium Park. This provided an opportunity to discuss how abandoned and unmanaged fruit trees can lead to food-conditioned bears. The number of page followers increased from 687 in 2020 to 721 in 2021; a 9% increase.

The Castlegar News was regularly printing ads related to bear safety (Bear Aware) through the season. The WCC and the City of Castlegar collaborated on a one-page bear safety informative insert for the quarterly utility bill sent out to all Castlegar residents. The WCC and the City also collaborated on a fall newspaper article about the high volume of bear conflict calls the COS was receiving at the time, reminding residents how to secure and manage possible attractants. A press release was also developed by the WCC at this time and released by the City of Castlegar. The WCC offered answers to questions on the Bounce radio and a local podcast.

## Wildlife in Area Signs

All Bear in Area Signs were erected when residents specifically phoned the City of Castlegar staff or the WCC to report bear sightings and when the COS requested signage to be displayed. Signage was replenished in mid-summer in preparation for the busy fall. In total, signage was rotationally erected in 21 different locations within the City of Castlegar.



**Figure 9. Putting up bear in area signs with the local Bylaw officer (photo from 2020) and a sign up at the popular Cobra Climb after reports of a sow with cubs in the area.**



## Collaborations

Numerous collaborations took place during the 2021 season with WildSafeBC and these included (Figure 14):

- Conservation Officer Service – a wildlife safety officer was helpful in communicating locations experiencing bear conflicts in and around Castlegar. He also assisted at several engagement events and nights of garbage cart tagging.
- Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions - Gillian Sanders came to the Pass Creek Hall to present at an electric fencing workshop organized by the WCC.
- Castlegar Parks and Trails - offered space on existing infrastructure at the Merry Creek trailhead parking area for the WCC to affix a bear safety when mountain biking sign.
- The local Castlegar Kootenay Food Strategy Society (KFSS) - provided “Pick Me, Please” signage to the WCC to lend out to residents unable to manage their fruit trees. Residents could request these signs that encouraged others to glean the excess fruit, preventing food waste and food-conditioned bears. The Kootenay Foods Society volunteer fruit gleaning group disbanded because of a lack of committed volunteers.
- The City of Castlegar – initiated the community dumpster pilot project and removal of Millennium Park unmanaged apple trees located next to trails, based on WCC recommendations.



**Figure 10. A & B: Mountain Biking and Bear Safety Sign put up at Merry Creek biking area. C & D: 'PICK ME, PLEASE' signs put up at fruit trees in the community. E: The City of Castlegar cutting down an apple tree next to a trail in Millennium Park.**

## Challenges and Opportunities

The City of Castlegar experienced a high number of human-bear conflict reports this season, due to a poor berry crop resulting from very hot and dry summer conditions. Bears visited our communities on a regular basis in efforts to find food. Castlegar continues to have challenges in managing attractants that lead to food-conditioned bears. There has been an increase in garbage cart damage this year, especially to the clips and lids. The WCC reached out to other communities and recommended a new style of clip to replace the existing ones with when they become damaged (Figure 15 B). If these are not successful, another solution will be needed. Waste Management developed a sticker to be placed on garbage carts to remind residents of rules around garbage carts (when to put out, when to unlock clips, not to overfill etc.).



**Figure 11. A: Unsecured garbage cart knocked over by a bear in the downtown area. B: Original and suggested replacement clips for bear resistant garbage carts.**

Moving forward, recommendations include considering the impact of organics collection on human-bear conflicts in the community and putting measures in place to mitigate these concerns. Current challenges with the storage of bear-resistant carts will likely translate to similar issues with the organics rollout. Improper storage leads to high numbers of bear damaged carts and food-conditioned bears. There should also be further education on: replacing fruit or nut-bearing trees with other suitable trees; and highlighting the wildlife attractant and solid waste bylaws upheld by the City of Castlegar. New residents to Castlegar may be unaware of the bylaws and need easily accessible information. Ongoing education should continue to inform residents of new programs, initiatives, and how to get bins repaired through the City of Castlegar website, Facebook page, and quarterly utility bills.

Many of the homes in the downtown area do not have garages, leaving residents to store garbage outside, often accessible to bears. Some residents effectively chain or strap the bear-resistant bins to posts or trees, but most do not, allowing bears to drag garbage away and rip the bin apart. The result is a food-conditioned bear. There was an emphasis on education in this area, however, this must be ongoing. An increase in enforcement efforts is needed or alternative solutions provided to residents such as the continuation of the community dumpster program or other infrastructure offered to residents to properly secure their garbage carts.

The following additional initiatives are recommended for 2022:

- Electric fence demonstration(s) and partner with residents on demonstration properties illustrating best practices
- Encourage food banks and other non-profits to setup fruit gleaning groups – the WCC sent out an email to interested parties in hopes they will organize a group next year.
- Continue the “Pick Me, Please” collaboration with the KFSS
- Continue door-to-door campaigns and wildlife in area signage in hotspots
- Continue education through radio ads, social media, and quarterly utility bills.
- Follow up with Pass Creek Campground on the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.
- Follow up with Home Hardware on bear resistant garbage cart order in spring 2022.
- Revisit the community dumpster solution and seek out other locations less prone to abuse (eg, parking lot by rail museum, City Hall and RCMP station and Public Works).
- Ensure the continuation of the Wildlife Working Group to facilitate ongoing implementation of Castlegar’s Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan
- Continue WildSafeBC presentations and bear spray workshops at Selkirk College and through Castlegar Parks and Trails. Currently, presentations are given to the International Student Program to educate foreign students about local wildlife natural history and safety in bear country.
- Initiate the garbage tagging program as soon as possible in the active bear season (April) and attempt to recruit volunteers to assist with this program with appropriate conflict mitigation training. Consistency is key with this program.
- Reduce the warning to ticket steps from 3 to 2 steps. Currently, residents receive 2 warnings before a ticket is issued when placing their garbage carts out the night before collection during the bear season. This system should suffice with 1 warning before a ticket is issued by the local bylaw officer.
- Work with Waste Management to distribute garbage cart reminder decals to residents.
- Explore funding options for fruit tree removal incentives or programs to allow a number of days for free fruit tree removal on private property with a first come first serve booking system or a cost share program to help residents with the costs of replacing fruit trees.
- Encourage an increase in enforcement efforts, targeting residents and businesses where repeated attractant mismanagement occurs.

Within the RDCK, specifically the communities of Raspberry, Brilliant, Robson and Ootischenia, there is no consistent garbage pick-up service. Residents of these communities can hire one of three companies that operate in the area, all with different pickup schedules, therefore the garbage cart tagging program is not suitable for these areas. Similar to the City of Castlegar, there is an abundance of fruit trees, many of which are not managed properly.

## Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank the City of Castlegar, the Province of BC, the RDCK, the BC Conservation Foundation, and the Columbia Basin Trust for their financial support of this

program. Thank you to local Conservation Officer Service; Castlegar Bylaw Officer Wayne Cox; the great staff at City Hall; the KFSS; the media outlets for running stories and broadcasts that helped spread the messaging of WildSafeBC; and Jenny Wallace and Pat Wray for their historical perspective on WildSafeBC in the Castlegar Area. Special thanks to WCC Cora Skaien for assisting in the delivery of the program. The WCC would also like to thank the community members of Castlegar for their support and readiness to learn about wildlife and attractant management strategies.