

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

Nelson

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Nelson Program between April 15 and November 30, 2021. The program covers the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) management zones E and F including the City of Nelson and the smaller unincorporated communities from Balfour to Bonnington (**Error! Reference source not found.**). The program is located within the traditional territories of the Sinixt, Ktunaxa Nation, Sylix, and Métis Peoples.

This season was notable for the highest number of black bear reports since 2016 with 293 reports. This is likely a result of natural food availability after a summer of drought and wildfires. This led to more bears seeking foods in communities. Of those reports, 149 involved non-natural food sources. Garbage was the most reported (62), followed by other (26), fruit trees (19), livestock (13), compost (11), freezers stored outside (9) and bird feeders (9).

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinators (WCCs) Rosie Wijenberg and David White performed 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 that the program was delivered safely and effectively. The WCCs provided 46 WildSafe Ranger presentations to 1,186 youth, delivered 6 wildlife awareness and safety presentations to 137 people, reached almost 900 people at display booths at Farmers' Markets and local trailheads, left over 900 door hangers and talked to 283 residents. WildSafeBC messaging was shared through 171 social media posts, 7 articles in the Nelson Star, and 10 radio appearances.

Thanks to generous funding from the Province of British Columbia, the Columbia Basin Trust, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the City of Nelson, the WildSafeBC Nelson program was a success in 2021. Moving forward, the WildSafeBC Nelson Program will need to continue to deliver education, provide solutions, and facilitate collaborations to address unsecured wildlife attractants and "keep wildlife wild and communities safe".

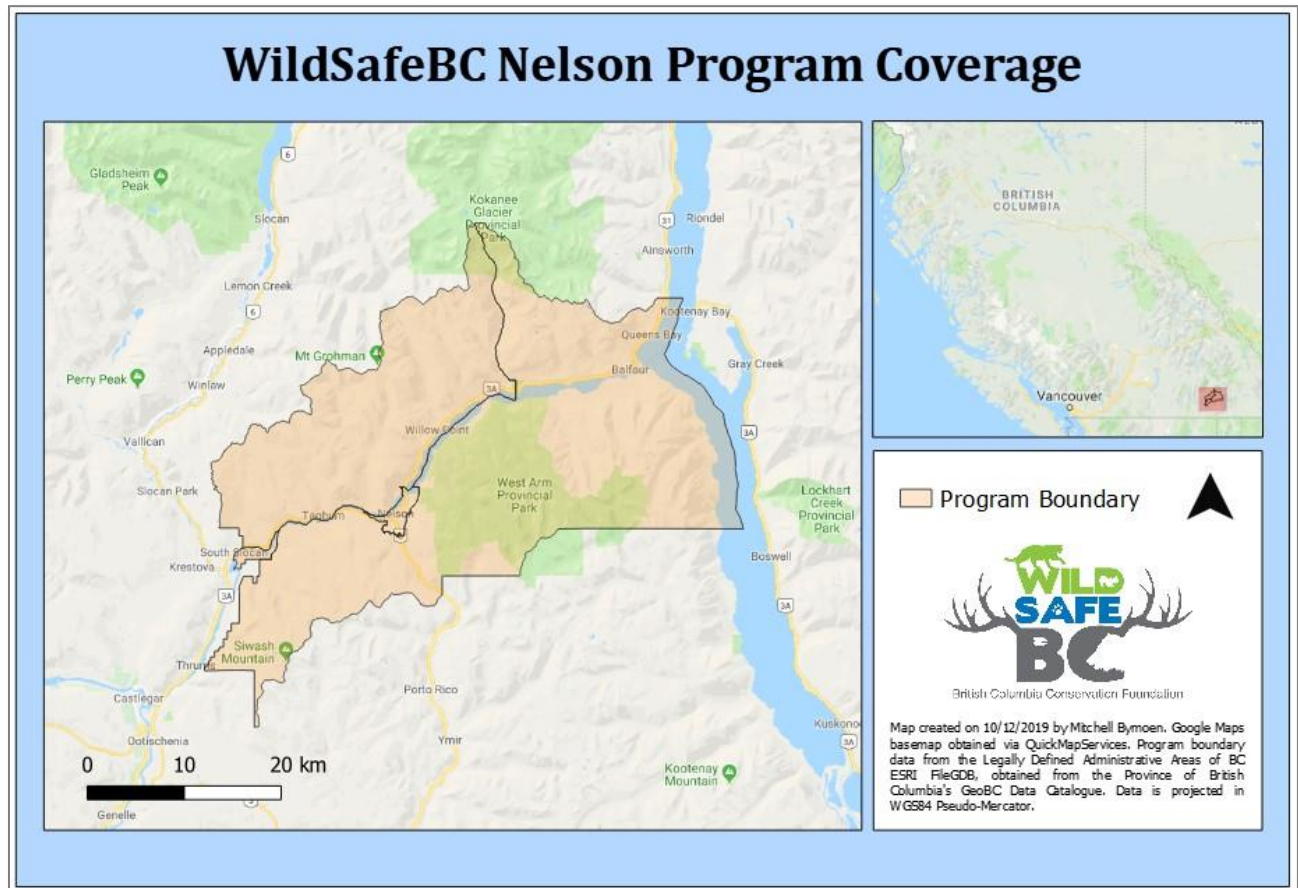


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Nelson coverage area.

Cover Photo: Grizzly bear near a local creek, by D. White.

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Highlights from 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) on the WildSafeBC website. This data is updated daily and this report for Nelson includes data from January 1, 2016 to Oct 31, 2021 (Figure 1).

From January 1 to Oct 31, 2021, there have been 293 black bear reports and 12 grizzly bear reports. This was the busiest year for black bear reports since 2016 (Figure 2). This is likely as a result of natural food availability after a summer of drought and forest fires. September was particular busy with 72 reports and 55 in October. Cougar reports (34) were below average and deer reports (42) were on par with the four year average (Figure 2).

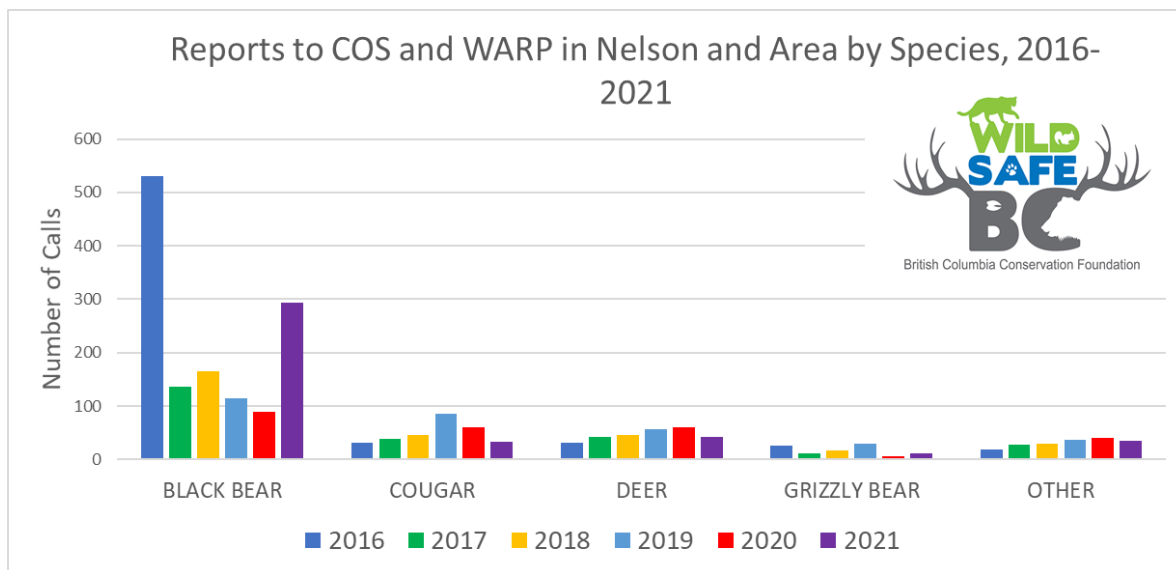


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP in Nelson by species, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

A total of 149 reports regarding black bears involved attractants with garbage being the most reported (62) (Figure 3). There were also reports of bears accessing residential fruit trees (19), livestock (13), compost (11), freezers (9), and bird feeders (9).

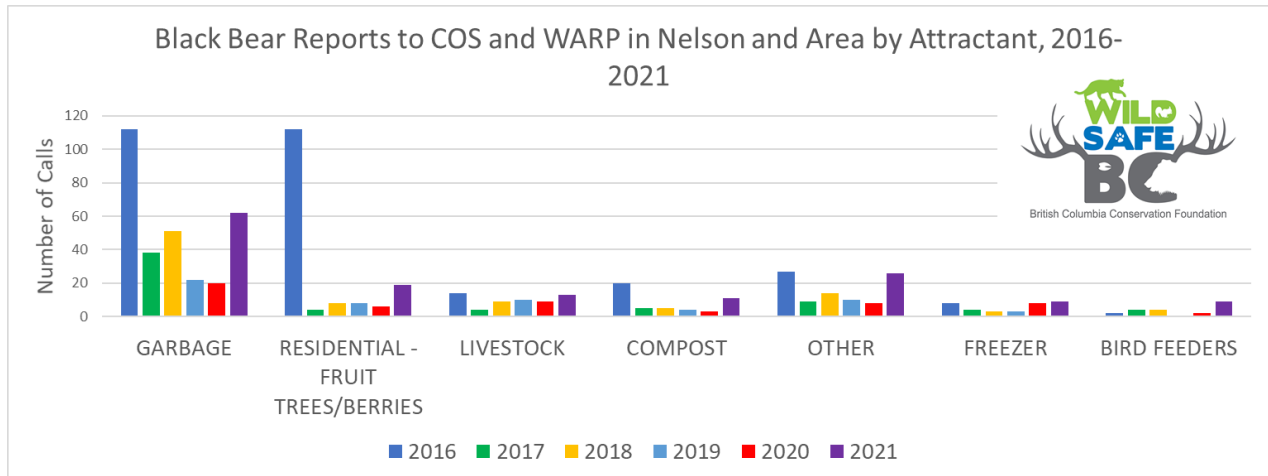


Figure 3. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP by attractant, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

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



The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict and engages youth to be aware of our impact on local wildlife (Figure 4). A total 1,186 students from 9 schools, pre-school to Grade 8 became WildSafe Rangers (Table 1). Over the season, the WCC hosted WRP presentations outside at schools and in field trips to Apex Summit, Cottonwood Lake, Kokanee Creek Provincial Park and the Rail Trail (Figure 5). Students learned about local wildlife biology, wildlife safety and attractant management during presentations that included storytelling, roll play, hands-on interactions with animal pelts and skulls and connection making.

Figure 4. Children engaged with wildlife through storytelling and hands on experience

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

Date	School	Grade	No. Participants
April 9, 2021	South Nelson	3-4 (2 classes)	55
May 11,19,27, 2021	St Joseph	Pre-8 (9 classes)	178
June 7 2021	South Nelson	k-1 (2 classes)	36
June 8 2021	South Nelson	4-5 (2 classes)	56
June 9 2021	Wildflower	Age group 1	43
June 10 2021	Wildflower	Sprouts-age group 2	40
Oct 4,7 2021	Rosemont	K-5 (6 classes)	114
Oct 8,12 2021	Blewett	K-5 (6 classes)	86
Oct 13 2021	Trafalgar	Multiage outdoor ed	32
Oct 15 2021	Redfish	K-4 (3 classes)	68
Nov 3 2021	Trafalgar	6 (2 classes)	64
Nov 4 2021	Homelinks	All grades field trip	22
Nov 18 2021	Trafalgar	8 (2 classes)	42
Nov 23 2021	Hume	K-3 (3 classes)	300
Nov 25-26 2021	Trafalgar	6, 8 (3 classes)	50



Figure 5. The WCC taught children about attractant management and wildlife safety at 9 schools.

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC provided 5 presentations to 97 participants and provided support to a grizzly bear safety workshop with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions (50 people) (Table 2, Figure 6). Presentations focused on safety and bear spray usage. The number of presentations were impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, but where still allowed, the program made the most of the opportunities available.

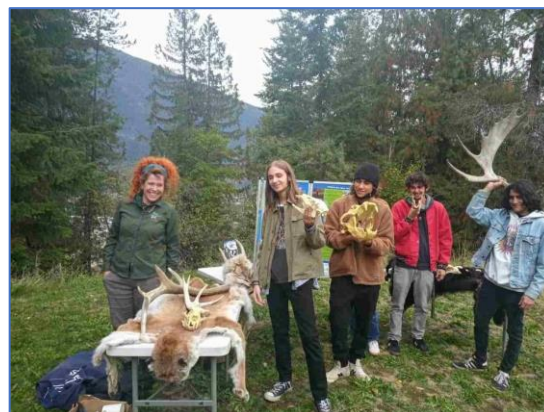


Figure 6. Selkirk College Student Housing Safety Presentation, a moment of levity.

Table 2. Presentations to community groups in 2021.

Date	Organization	Topic	Number of Participants
May 26, 2021	Valhalla Pure Employee Training	Bear Spray Workshop	15
May 29 2021	Kokanee Creek Provincial Park Visitor Center	Safety around wildlife	12
June 9 2021	Cottonwood Lake	Bear Spray Demo	7
June 23 2021	Nelson Rod and Gun Club	Support for Grizzly Bear Solutions Grizzly Bear Safety Presentation	50
June 30 2021	Selkirk College International Students	Wildlife Safety and bear Spray Demonstration	46
Oct 2 2021	Selkirk College Student Housing	Safety Presentation	7

Display Booths

Display booths were set up at farmers' markets, trailheads and at Kokanee Creek Nature Park this year (Figure 7). The WCC attended Cottonwood Market (3 times) and Harrop Market (6 times) reaching 321 people (Table 3). Display booths at these events are a great way to reach community members from diverse backgrounds.

Trailhead booths focused on safety and bear spray usage. Locations were chosen in response to popularity and wildlife activity, specifically in response to a Pulpit Trail closure due to an aggressive cougar encounter and an aggressive grizzly encounter on the popular mountain bike trails above Kokanee Creek Park. These booths reached 457 people and were very well received. On demand bear spray training was provided at each of these events. A booth targeting families and kids camping at Kokanee Creek Park helped spread information on bare camping principals.



Figure 7. The WCC set up display booths at farmers markets and local trailheads this year.

Table 3. Summary of people reached through public displays in 2021

Event	# Event	Number of People Reached
Harrop Market	6 events	117
Cottonwood Lake Market	4 events	204
Trail head booths (Pulpit, Rail Trail, Lions Bluff, Kokanee Creek Bike Trails, Cottonwood Lake)	8 events	457
Kokanee Creek Nature Park	1 event	70

Door-to-Door and Garbage Tagging

The Nelson Program engaged in a targeted door-to-door campaign to provide information on bears and other wildlife present in areas with active attractant management and wildlife conflict issues, including Rosemont, Uphill, Upper Fairview and Gyro Park in Nelson proper, and Beasley, Bonnington, 6 mile and Balfour outside of Nelson. Targeted areas were chosen based on community reports, WildSafeBC's WARP program and at the request of the local COS. The door-to-door campaign involved talking directly to people already outside their homes and leaving contact information and door hangers on residences where no direct conversations occurred. A total of 254 residents were directly talked to and 903 door hangers were left (Figure 8). Residents that wanted more information could call and discuss their concerns. At all areas covered, information was also provided about rat mitigation. Nearly 100 hours were spent conducting door-to-door campaigns.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection (Figure 8). This is followed by a friendly visit the next day to discuss the hazards of leaving garbage on the curb throughout the night. During 6 outings, only 23 bins were tagged. This indicates that the program has been effective over the years in increasing awareness and many residents are now adopting better practices, however outside garbage storage and early morning setting out of garbage is still an issue at some residences (these conclusions have yet to be confirmed, one more set of garbage tagging outing to do).



Figure 8. Information left during door-to-door campaign (left) and garbage tags left on a bin that was placed on the curb on the evening before collection (right).

Brochure Distribution

The WCC delivered brochures to outdoor product retailers, the Nelson Visitor Centre, local gas stations, the office of Natural Resources, and Kokanee Creek Park Visitor Center, a popular destination in which many brochures are used (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Brochures on wildlife species and safety were distributed throughout the area.

Social Media and Press

The Nelson program continued its tradition of writing articles for the Nelson Star with four articles published this season, including articles on ticks, wildlife encounters, fruit trees and bears, Halloween wildlife safety and wildlife photography ethics (Figure 10). WildSafeBC also contributed comments to the Star on articles involving backyard chickens in residential areas and also bears accessing public garbage bins. The Nelson Program made radio appearances five times on Bounce Radio 106.9, four times on EZRock103.5 and three times on Kootenay Coop radio (94.1). The WCC also appeared on the West Kootenay This Week Podcast once and regularly in the What's on Nelson weekly online newsletter.

The Nelson program increased its presence on Facebook by publishing over 100 posts this year, on our page and also on community pages, with a reach of 52,124 and almost 15,000 views on our page. The number of followers on the WildSafeBC Nelson page grew from 605 to 1051 followers this year. Many of the posts included trail camera videos collected from the areas surrounding Nelson. WildSafeBC is also active on popular community pages in the Nelson area, providing area specific information on local wildlife activity.

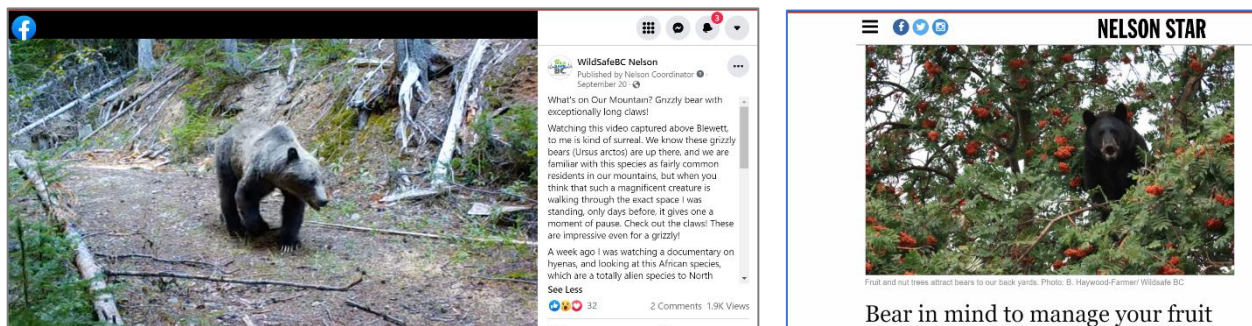


Figure 10. Example of post to the WildSafeBC Nelson Facebook page (left) and column in the Nelson Star (right).

Special Initiatives

Bear-resistant garbage bins

Several schools in the Nelson area had issues with commercial bins being accessed by bears. The WCC worked with the COS, SD8 and local waste management companies to ensure that appropriate bear-resistant bins were installed in these sensitive areas.

A bear in Lakeside Park that accessed public garbage bins brought attention to the need for more bear-resistant bins in public spaces and an increased frequency of garbage pickup. The City of Nelson has committed to install more bear-resistant bins in the future.

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 Nelson 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 WildSafeBC 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.
- Explore solutions to continue to offer bear-resistant containers in the region as the program has been discontinued by the City of Nelson.

Acknowledgments

The Nelson WildSafeBC Program was successfully delivered this season with the support of David White, the Nelson coordinator for many years. The WCC would like to acknowledge the generous support it receives from its sponsors the Province of British Columbia, the Columbia Basin Trust, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the City of Nelson.

The WCC also values the important support provided by Conservation Officers Nathan Smienk and Jason Hawkes as well as the following schools for their commitment to the WildSafe Ranger education program: Kootenay Lake School District 8, Trafalgar Middle School, Blewett Elementary School, South Nelson Elementary School, Rosemont Elementary School, Redfish Elementary School, Wildflower Elementary School, Hume Elementary School, St. Joseph's Catholic School and the Homelinks homeschool program. A special thanks to Anne and Rick

Pidgeon operators of Kokanee Creek Provincial Park campground as well as Joanne Siderius and the crew at the Kokanee Creek Visitor Centre for their commitment and hard work in keeping wildlife wild and campers educated and safe. Finally, thank you to the Nelson Star Newspaper, 103.5 Juice FM Radio, and EZ Rock 106.9 FM and the Nelson Co-op radio (93.5FM) for promoting our WildSafeBC messaging to the community at large and helping us deliver our safety information to a wider audience. Thank you also to Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions for collaborations and presentations.