

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

## Alberni Valley

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## Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program between May 1<sup>st</sup> and August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022. The program area includes the City of Port Alberni and the surrounding Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) electoral areas of Sproat Lake, Cherry Creek, Beaver Creek, and Beaufort, all of which reside on the traditional territories of the Hupačasath and Tseshaht First Nations (Figure 1). In 2022, the most reported animals were black bears, cougars, and black-tailed deer.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed various outreach activities, with the goal of preventing human-wildlife conflicts within the community. All these activities resulted in over 250 face-to-face conversations delivering the WildSafeBC message to residents and visitors in the area. The following list summarizes key program activities over the course of the season:

- 2 WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) presentations reaching 41 kids (City of Port Alberni Summer Camps)
- 1 bear spray presentation given to summer camp leaders for the City of Port Alberni with 15 participants
- 2 farmers' markets engaging with 29 people
- 150 people contacted through door-to-door activities; 75, in-person conversations and 75 door hangers left
- 9 bin-tagging surveys were conducted with a total of 215 bins tagged; only 9 of which were then tagged again during a subsequent follow up survey
- 17 Facebook posts, increasing the Facebook page following from 419 to 459 (an increase of 9.5%)

The WCC worked in collaboration with the Hupačasath First Nations communications department to deliver information and messaging on how to better manage attractants during the salmon-fishing season to help keep their fish stocks and communities safe.

Challenges faced in the 2022 season included staffing changes and shortages in key organizations that support the WCC throughout the season. As well, a lack of public knowledge of ACRD and City bylaws regarding attractant management lead to more wildlife, including bears, to be attracted into urban areas within the community. This then resulted in a higher number of bear sightings within the community this season. Due to the lack of knowledge of local bylaws, over 50% of the residents in the program area improperly stored their solid waste collection carts.

The opportunity to create a District-wide public newsletter would be a benefit to the community efforts to maintain its Bear Smart Community Status. A bear working group would be helpful in bringing community stakeholders together to discuss issues and formulate collaborative solutions that will benefit residents and visitors alike. Working to overcome some of these challenges and supporting enforcement of Bear Smart Community bylaws would go far to help keep wildlife wild and the community safe.

WildSafeBC Alberni Valley would like to thank the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF), the Province of British Columbia, and the ACRD for funding and supporting the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Program. The WCC is grateful for the support and collaborative efforts of participating community organizations, local municipal and district staff, and community residents and visitors in working to become better at coexisting with local wildlife.

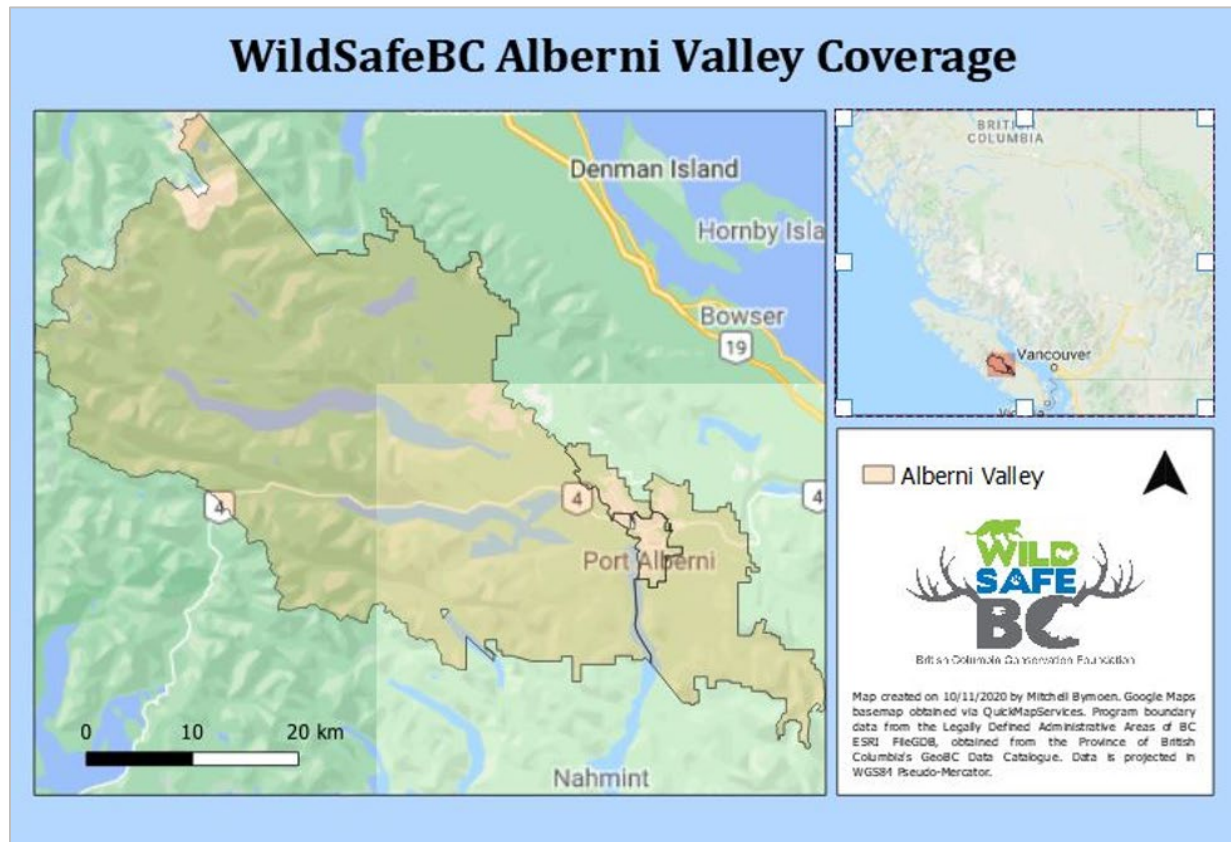


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program coverage area.

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**Cover Photo: WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Coordinator with Display Booth setup at 2022 summer event.**

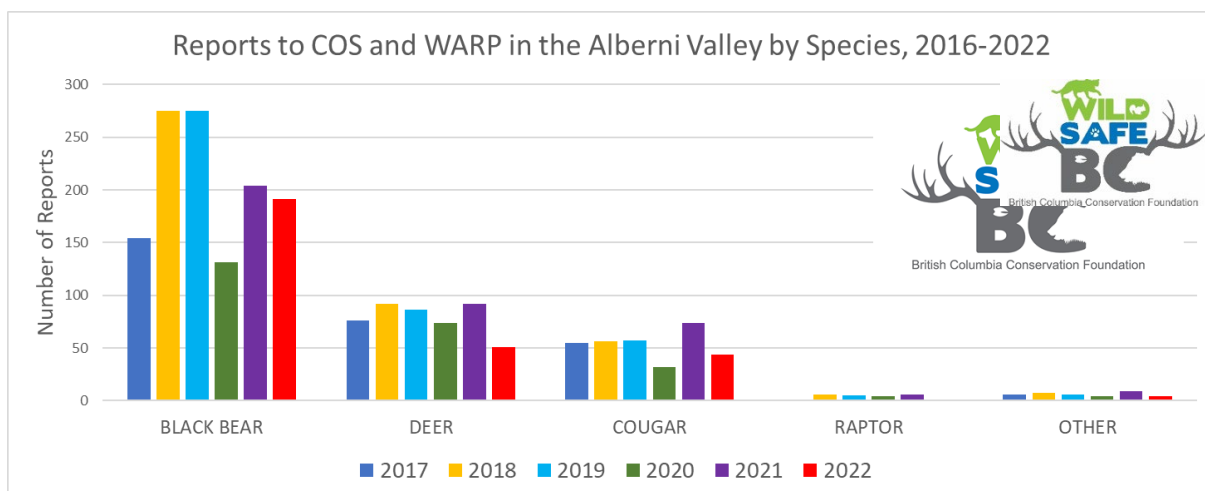


## Highlights from the 2022 Season

### Wildlife Activity

Any wildlife reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) or through the online form (<https://forms.gov.bc.ca/environment/rapp/>) are available for public viewing through the WildSafeBC Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). The WARP data is updated daily, and the following graph for the Alberni Valley shows reports from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, to November 26<sup>th</sup> 2022.

Similar to previous years, black bears were the species most often reported to the COS, followed by deer and cougars. This season there were 191 black bear reports in the Alberni Valley, which is just below the five-year average of 201 (Figure 2). There was a decrease in the number of deer reports in the Alberni Valley this year. Reports of cougars were also close to average. Conversations with local residents indicated to the WCC that the usual attractants bringing wildlife into the urban areas were garbage and fruit trees.



**Figure 2. Reports to the COS & WARP by species, 2019-2022.**

Black bear reports were highest in August and then again in October there was a large increase in reports made about black bears (Figure 3). In the early spring of 2022, natural foods were plentiful including grasses, sedges, horsetail, and skunk cabbage, and there was an expectation that abundant crops of various berries would follow. August can be a period of high berry availability on the West Coast and in past years, it has been a month where human-bear conflicts usually remained lower. However in 2022, incident numbers peaked in August. This could be due to a longer period of continuous wet and cool weather affecting berry crops across the west side of the Island. This unexpected weather trend led to limited availability of crucial seasonal natural food sources pushing bears to seek out easy and attractive food sources in nearby urban areas.

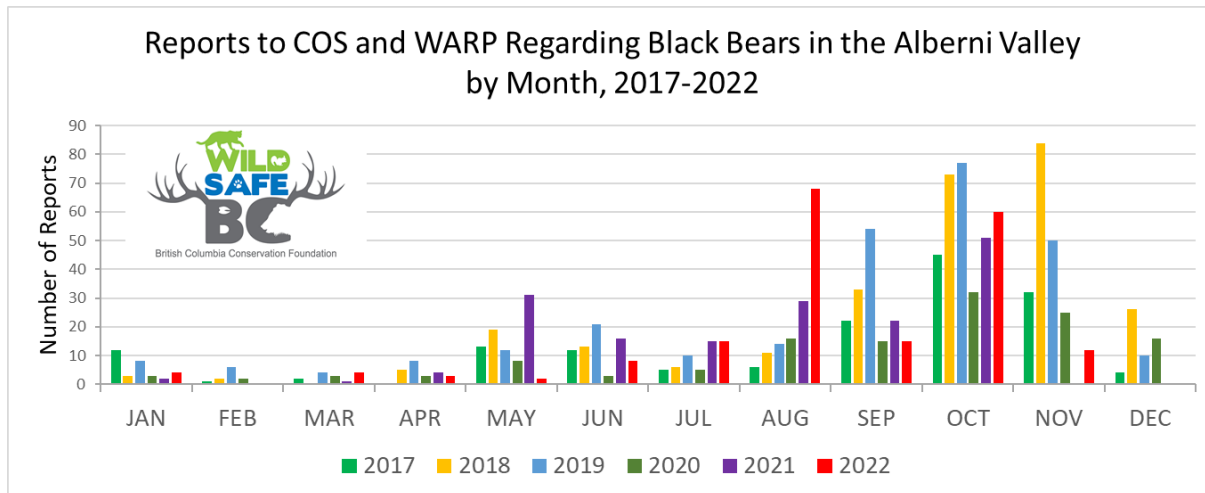


Figure 3. Reports regarding Black Bears by month, 2019-2022.

## WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) is designed to familiarize youth with local wildlife, and introduce them to the causes and negative impacts of human-wildlife conflict. While this year's WCC did not have the opportunity to go into schools to deliver the WRP, two groups of children from the City of Port Alberni Youth Summer Camps participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program for a total of 41 participants. These children received activity booklets to share with their families. The ages ranged from 5 to 8 and 7 to 12. Positive feedback was received from the children and the youth camp leaders about the relevance of the program to the residents of Port Alberni.

## Presentations to Community Groups

WildSafeBC provides presentations to community groups interested in learning more about wildlife awareness and safety, electric fencing workshops, and bear spray workshops. This summer one presentation was given within the coverage area. The City of Port Alberni arranged a bear spray workshop for their Youth Camp Leaders and 15 people participated. Another bear spray workshop was to be scheduled but lack of sufficient registrations resulted in cancellation of the event.

## Display Booths

Display booths were an effective way to reach a diverse mix of people with WildSafeBC messaging. Participation in these public events provided an opportunity to engage with the public and provide information about local wildlife activity, bring awareness to attractants that can bring wildlife into urban areas, as well as provide residents and visitors with solutions for managing attractants to help reduce human-wildlife conflicts. This year the WildSafeBC program participated in two farmers' markets (Table 1; Figure 4).

**Table 1. Farmer's Market dates and locations**

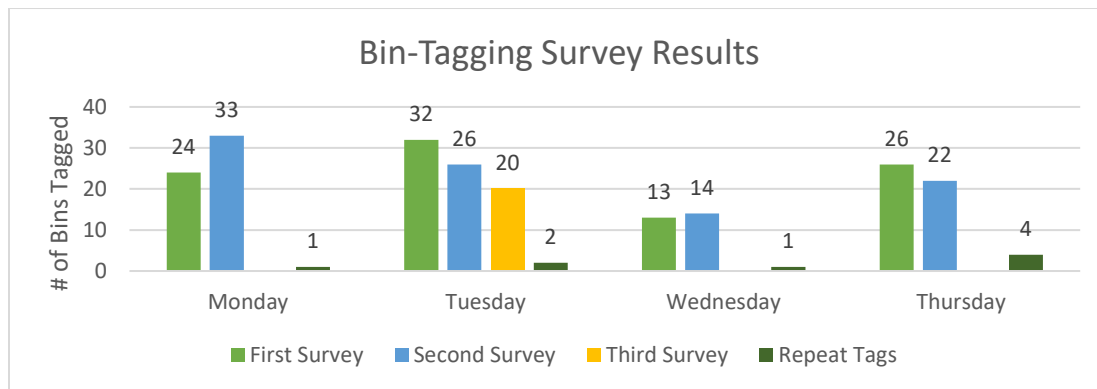
Location	Public Interactions	Date
Spirit Square Farmer's Market	13	July 9 <sup>th</sup> , 2022
Uptown Night Market	16	July 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2022

**Figure 4. Display booth setup with FireSmartBC at a local market in 2022 season.**

## Door-to-Door Education & Bin-Tagging

Through several outings of door-to-door canvassing, over 150 people were reached with in-person conversations, and 75 households were provided with door hangers informing them of wildlife activity and attractant management techniques.

Bin tagging is an educational activity performed by the WCC that consists of placing a yellow warning sticker on garbage and organics bins placed out on the curb the night before the day of pickup. A total of 9 surveys were done resulting in a total of 218 bins tagged (Figure 5). Areas with the highest number of bins tagged and high numbers of bear and cougar reports were revisited with door-to-door outreach. These included 10th avenue, John Howitt School, and the neighbourhoods surrounding Redford Street which were some of the highest conflict areas within the City.



**Figure 5. Bin-tagging Survey Results**

## Social Media

The WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Facebook page grew by 9.5% over the short season a WCC was available to work in the area. There were 17 Facebook posts made on the Alberni Valley Facebook page and 2 posts were made on the local social media page AV Chatterbox. Topics for Facebook posts included updates on wildlife activity from the WARP data, event dates and times, and informational garbage tagging posts.

## Wildlife in Area Signs

“Wildlife in Area” signs were placed in areas considered wildlife hotspots around the City (Figure 6). In residential areas, specific residential “Bear in Area” signs were posted to encourage residents to take extra care when it comes to securing their garbage and compost before collection day. Between May and August approximately 10 signs were posted in areas with recent wildlife sightings including Roger Creek and Maquinna trailheads, the Log Train trailheads, the Kitsuksis Dyke trail, and neighbourhoods around 10<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues, as well as John Howitt School.



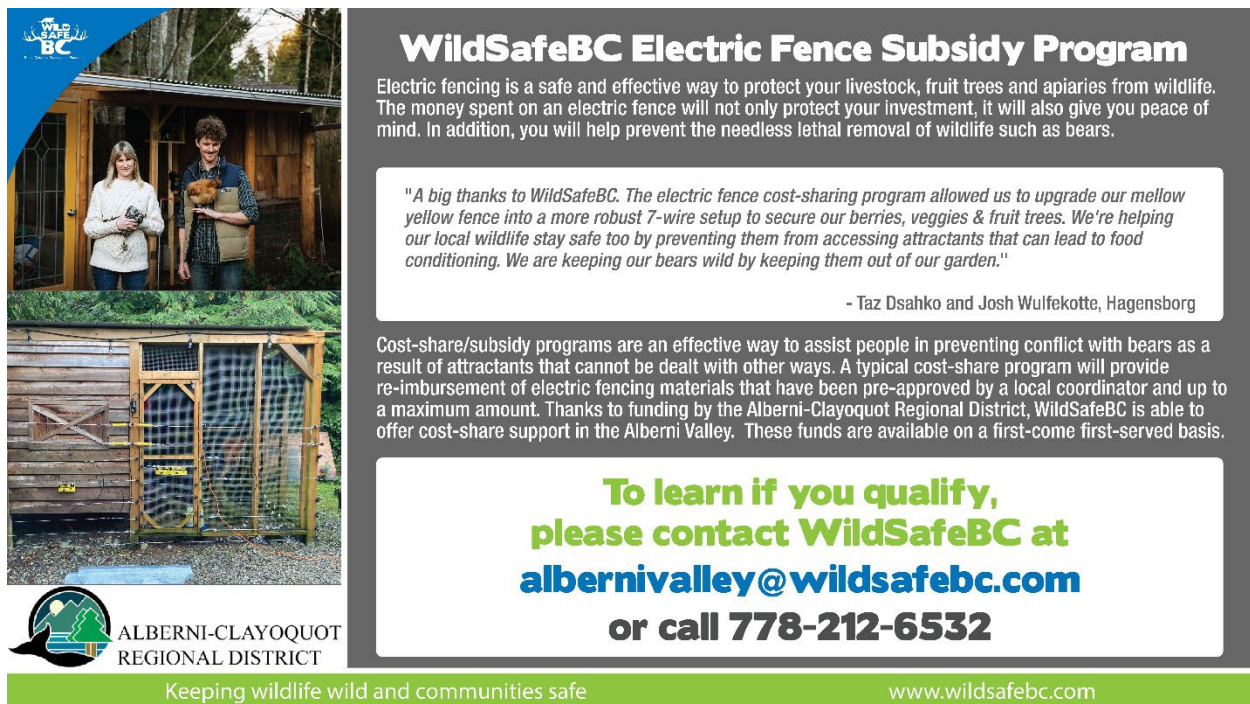
**Figure 6. Bear in Area sign posted in local neighbourhood.**



## Collaborations

This season the WCC had the opportunity to collaborate with the communications team from the Hupačasath First Nations regarding issues around the storage of fish and fishing gear. Multiple complaints from band members resulted in a habituated and food-conditioned bear being trapped and destroyed. The bear was accessing the unsecured fish freezer located in a resident's yard and eating the fish out of it. After meetings with the Band Chief and communications manager, the WCC provided information on attractant securement so that a newsletter could be distributed to all band members providing ideas for solutions to attractant management.

Additionally, the ACRD provided funding and support for a cost-share program for Alberni Valley residents who were willing to learn about, plan and install electric fencing to secure their attractants such as chicken coops, livestock feed stores, fruit trees and others (Figure 7). The funding supported the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Coordinator in recognizing local needs and recommending the program to residents who could benefit from an e-fence installation.



**WildSafeBC Electric Fence Subsidy Program**


Electric fencing is a safe and effective way to protect your livestock, fruit trees and apiaries from wildlife. The money spent on an electric fence will not only protect your investment, it will also give you peace of mind. In addition, you will help prevent the needless lethal removal of wildlife such as bears.

*"A big thanks to WildSafeBC. The electric fence cost-sharing program allowed us to upgrade our mellow yellow fence into a more robust 7-wire setup to secure our berries, veggies & fruit trees. We're helping our local wildlife stay safe too by preventing them from accessing attractants that can lead to food conditioning. We are keeping our bears wild by keeping them out of our garden."*

- Taz Dsahko and Josh Wulfekotte, Hagensborg

Cost-share/subsidy programs are an effective way to assist people in preventing conflict with bears as a result of attractants that cannot be dealt with other ways. A typical cost-share program will provide re-imbursement of electric fencing materials that have been pre-approved by a local coordinator and up to a maximum amount. Thanks to funding by the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, WildSafeBC is able to offer cost-share support in the Alberni Valley. These funds are available on a first-come first-served basis.

**To learn if you qualify,  
please contact WildSafeBC at  
[alberni valley@wildsafebc.com](mailto:alberni valley@wildsafebc.com)  
or call 778-212-6532**

 ALBERNI-CLAYOQUOT  
REGIONAL DISTRICT

Keeping wildlife wild and communities safe [www.wildsafebc.com](http://www.wildsafebc.com)

Figure 7. Electric Fence Cost-Share Advertisement for Alberni Valley area.

In late 2022, two Port Alberni residents reached out to WildSafeBC for electric fencing installation advice and cost-share report. The WildSafeBC Program manager was able to assist one resident remotely in purchasing the correct materials and installation, as well as accessing the subsidy. The resident was strongly motivated to improve her existing installation after losing a tom turkey to a black bear. With more livestock at risk, she quickly bolstered her design to WildSafeBC specifications and has not had any issues since. Another resident has reached out for support, and the WildSafeBC Pacific Rim coordinator is currently working with this resident.

## Remote Support

The WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program was being delivered in person by a WCC from May to August 31, after which the WCC moved away from the area and was no longer available. WildSafeBC was able to provide remote support through the Program Manager (electric fencing support previously mentioned) and the Wildlife Provincial Support Specialist. During this period the Provincial Support Specialist fielded 13 calls from the public or referrals from the Conservation Officer Service. These calls included reports of a bear trying to access the bear-resistant compost containers in a densely populated area as late as mid-December.

In addition, the Provincial Support team also posted to Facebook 17 times and was a point of contact for local government.

## Challenges & Opportunities

Garbage and organics are still the most reported attractants available to bears in the Alberni Valley. Bin tagging education is a highly effective method of changing human behaviours around managing garbage. However, a lack of understanding of City and ACRD bylaws causes a large number of residents and visitors to not participate in attractant management best practices. Due to the high number of residents who store their garbage in an unsecured manner, more work must be done by all stakeholders to assist residents in securing their carts. This would be the most effective way for the community to see a reduction in the number of bear encounters related to solid waste attractants.

Fruit trees and berry crops continue to be the second highest reported attractant in the valley. Residents remain reluctant to proactively manage their fruit trees or secure them with electric fencing. This is a common issue throughout BC, where fruit trees are not perceived as an attractant leading to safety risks in the community and the lethal removal of bears. Other unsecured attractants include backyard livestock such as chickens and rabbits. The region could benefit from more electric fencing promotions and workshops as well as bylaw enforcement and bylaw changes to require attractant management practice be followed by all those living in the area. To address the above-mentioned issues, the following opportunities should be explored in 2023:

- Increased education on electric-fencing and promotion of cost-share program
- Update bylaws regarding urban livestock, beehives, and residential fruit trees and crops
- Regional mail out of educational letter regarding attractant management bylaws
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in human-wildlife conflict hot spots
- Replacement of residential waste collection bins that do not have bear-resistant hardware

- Bylaw engagement and enforcement strategies for garbage/organics and fruit tree management
- Increased WildSafeBC messaging on the ACRD and City of Port Alberni websites and social media pages

As a designated Bear Smart Community, it is recommended that the City of Port Alberni continually review its commitments to the Program and implement practices that establish Port Alberni as a community that values and protects its local wildlife while also keeping the community safe.

## Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank Jodie Frank, Brenda Sauve, Paulo Eichelberger, and Anna Strain from the ACRD as well as Sara Darling and Chris Baker from the City of Port Alberni for their support and assistance in the delivery of the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program. The WCC would also like to thank Conservation Officers Caitlin Bickford, Andrew Riddell, and Dan Eichstadter for their support. Special thanks to the BC Conservation Foundation team including Kathy Murray for their ongoing support throughout the season.