

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

Bamfield

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Bamfield Program between April 15, and November 30, 2022. The program area falls within the boundaries of Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) Area A which includes the unincorporated town of Bamfield and the Huu-ay-aht First Nation Village of Anacla (Figure 1).

There were less incidents of wildlife conflict in Bamfield in 2022 when compared with 2021. Human-bear conflict peaked during the late summer months and dropped off during the fall months when conflict normally increases due to bears preparing for winter. There was a decrease in cougar activity from last year. There were a number of natural and non-natural factors influencing wildlife conflict. Some of the natural factors included cold weather patterns that delayed berry production in the spring and early summer as well as the normal dispersal of sub-adult cougars from family units. Non-natural factors included attractant management issues resulting from poor waste management practices in the region.

Thanks to the support from our sponsors this year, the WildSafeBC Bamfield Coordinator (WCC) was able to perform a number of community outreach initiatives. The number of people following the WildSafeBC Bamfield Facebook page doubled this year to 157. In-person efforts by the WCC this season reached 1,097 individuals. These engagement activities included WildSafeBC brochure distribution, onsite consultations about cost-share programs, discussions about attractant management practices as well as the promotion of the WildSafeBC Business Pledge and the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.

The main source of attractants for bears was the lack of bear-resistant garbage bins in the community, fish refuse and compost in the intertidal, unsecured compost bins and garbage improperly stored in non-bear-resistant structures. Cougar attractants included fish refuse in the intertidal, backyard chickens, as well as deer and domestic pets. The main conflict reduction strategies included:

- Addressing issues with non-bear-resistant public refuse bins.
- Promotion of the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.
- Installation of a permanent electric fence around the transfer station.
- Attractant management education provided to the public.
- Promoting the cost-share program to encourage the purchase of bear-resistant products.

Bamfield is in the process of working towards attaining Bear Smart Community status. The next step is to develop a community-based Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan and Bear Smart bylaws. Continued community engagement will help inform our vision of a Bear Smart Community in this evolving landscape.

Thank you to the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF), the Province of British Columbia, the ACRD and the Bamfield Community Affairs Grant-in-Aid Program for funding and supporting the WildSafeBC Bamfield Program. Building connections within the community and providing WildSafeBC outreach activities will help to address human-wildlife conflict challenges and help “keep wildlife wild and communities safe”.

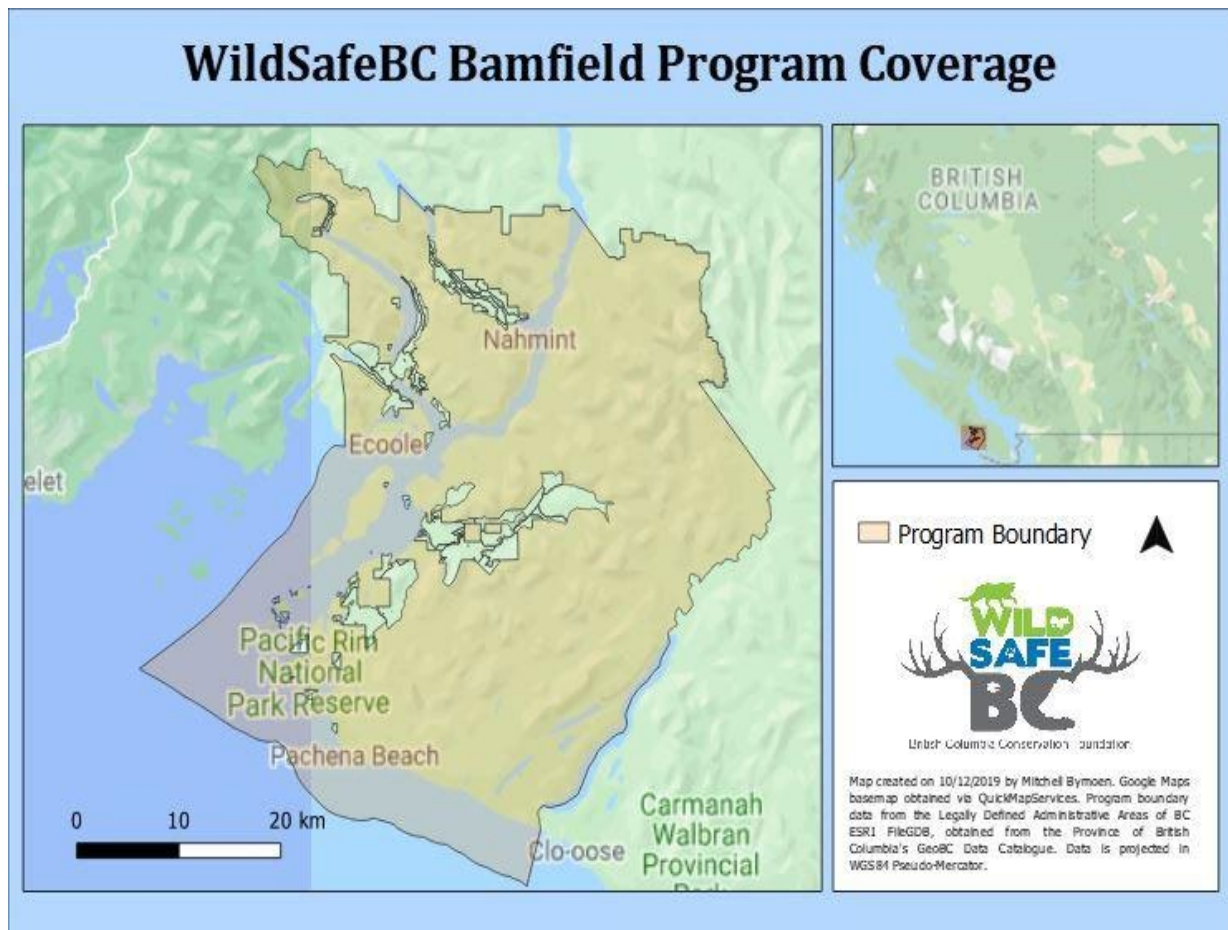


Figure 1. Map of the WildSafeBC Bamfield program coverage.

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Cover Photo: Resident with new secure and bear resistant composter purchased with the support of the cost share program funded by the ACRD in 2022.

Highlights from the 2022 season

Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) and online form (<https://forms.gov.bc.ca/environment/rapp/>) are available to the public through the WildSafeBC Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) on the WildSafeBC website. Since very few residents in Bamfield and Anacla call the RAPP line to report sightings or negative interactions with wildlife, this report is primarily based on the WildSafeBC Coordinator's observations, in combination with updates from Conservation Officers and with local residents and visitors.

There was a decrease in reports of human-bear conflicts and cougar activity when compared to last year (Figure 2). This may have been due to residents and visitors not reporting interactions with wildlife.

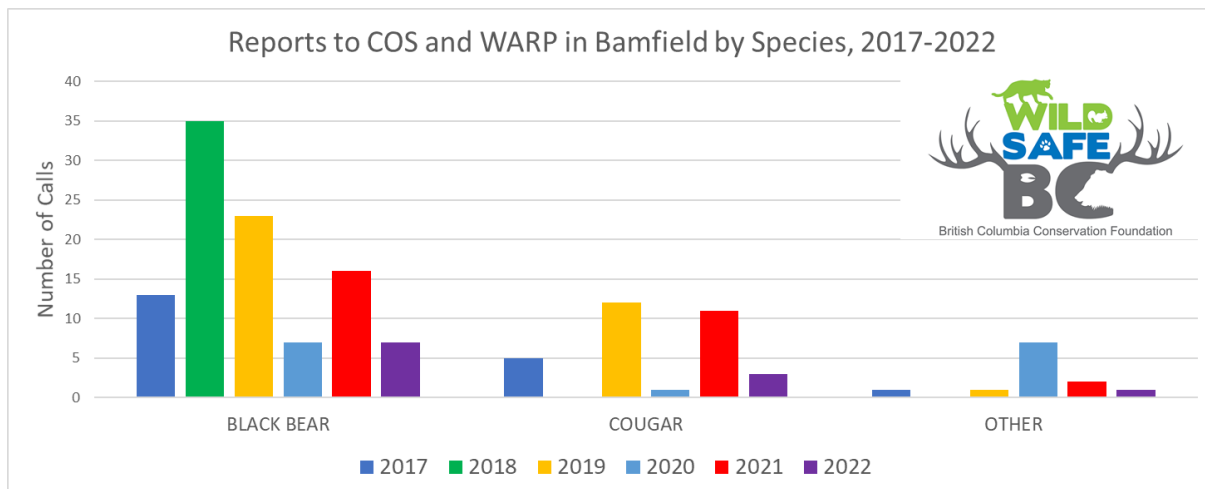


Figure 2. Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) by key species from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022 in Bamfield.

There was an increase in bear activity in the early summer, likely as a result of bears looking for food in town because of the delayed onset of the wild berry production from the cold and wet weather. Human-bear conflict started earlier this year and ended early than usual. Conflict began in late July and peaked in late August. While there was evidence of bear activity in both east and west Bamfield there was little conflict reported between September and November (Figure 3). This is unusual since typically, food-conditioned bears start to become an issue closer to September when entering into hyperphagia in preparation for hibernation.

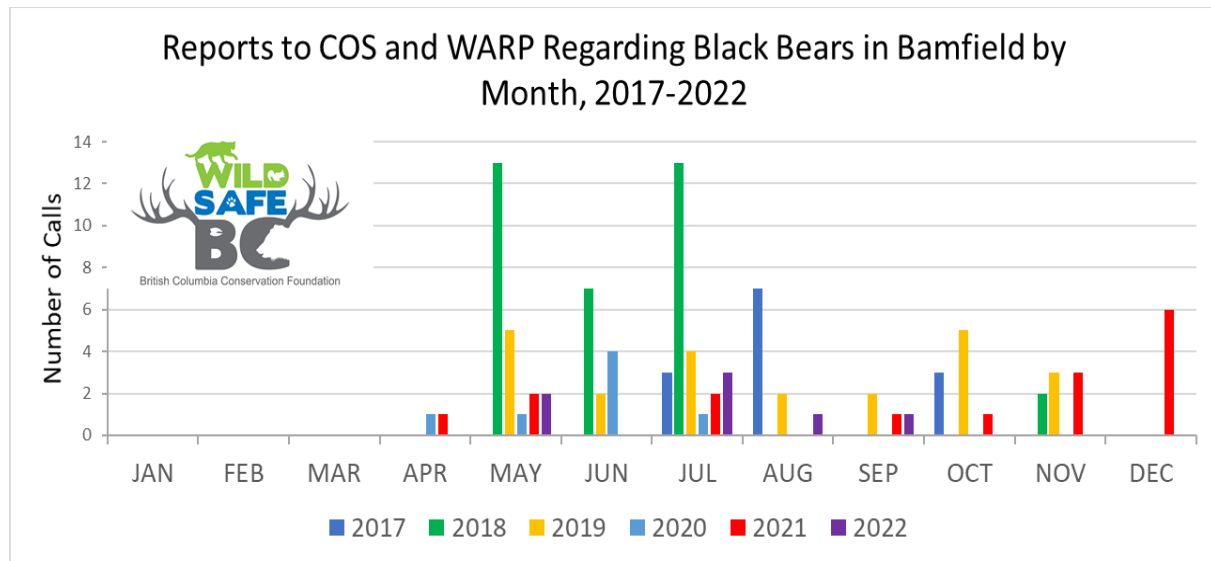


Figure 3. Black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) by month from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022 in Bamfield.

East Bamfield and Anacla

By August a number of bears on the eastside had become food conditioned because of continued access to broken and non-bear resistant public garbage bins. Negative bear interactions started to escalate in mid to late August, causing conflict with campers at the Pachena Bay Campground. Two vehicles (a van and a camper) were accessed by bears at the campsite. There was one other incident of a bear entering a vehicle in east Bamfield and a bear entering a trailer home. A number of wooden sheds and garages were entered by bears to gain access to unsecured household garbage. There were several reports to the WCC of BBQs being knocked over and composters being regularly accessed throughout the summer.

West Bamfield

There was an increase in bear activity on the west side during July and August. There were two different family units of sows with cub(s), two boars, and at least one juvenile on the west side. Bear activity significantly increased in August on the southern end of the boardwalk. Bears were probably brought into this area because of the strong food smells coming from the new restaurant that recently opened on the boardwalk. There were two incidents reported of garbage being accessed by bears in residences close to the restaurant. Bears were also reported accessing fish and compost that had washed up in the intertidal.

Conflict with a sow and her cub arose indirectly because of the presence of the male bears in town. Male bears can be a threat to sows and cubs. Since large male bears are generally not well tolerated in town, sows with cubs will often use public spaces as a shield and forage close to populated areas. While this can be a safer option to avoid other bears, the proximity to people and pets often results in conflict. There were a number of incidents with people and off leash dogs being bluff charged by the sow, however this behaviour abated once the boars moved on in early September.

Two outdoor wooden sheds storing garbage were broken into on the west side in August. There were also a number of reports of bears accessing garbage that had been left outside and unsecured (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Bear carrying unsecured garbage away from a residence (Photo Credit: Kirk Friederich).

Cougar activity was down significantly when compared to last year. There were however, a number of daytime sightings on the eastside at and near Pachena Beach Campground in July. The presence of cougars in Bamfield and Anacla was likely a result of dispersing family units. The unit of three reported in the campground appeared to be either one adult with two dispersing sub-adults or three sub-adults. They were likely brought into town by attractants such as free-range chickens, deer, domestic pets, small animals (rats and raccoons), and fish refuse in the intertidal.

Cougars were captured on a trail camera in west Bamfield using the same driveway as last year to access the boardwalk. The WCC had speculated that cougars could be attracted to and be consuming fish refuse that had washed up in the intertidal. This theory was supported by the discovery of cougar scat that smelled like fish. The theory was further supported by large cat specialist Dr. Kris Everatt from the non-profit organization Panthera, who had stated having witnessed cougars consuming fresh fish that had washed up in the intertidal. This information further reinforces the need to discourage people from dumping fish refuse in the intertidal.

Cougar safety and attractant management was delivered through social media, in-person communications, and temporary signage. After the first cougar sighting, the Huu-ay-aht immediately posted a very effective educational safety infographic. People were encouraged to call the RAPP line and report any sightings.

Public Outreach

There were 1,097 individuals reached through WildSafeBC brochure distribution, onsite consultations about cost-sharing programs, and wildlife safety talks on the boardwalk and Brady's Beach where small groups of people often gather. The most popular brochures were the bear and cougar brochures followed by the Bare Campsite brochures (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The most popular WildSafeBC Brochures handed out to people in Bamfield during the 2022 season.

Social Media and Press

There were 157 WildSafeBC Bamfield Facebook followers at the end of the season, which is a doubling from last year. The WCC focused on connecting the WildSafeBC Facebook posts to the Bamfield Community Cork Board Facebook page to gain a wider audience through this season. The local newspaper *The New Bamfielder* was also an effective messaging tool. During the summer months each week a different attractant issue was chosen to form a short posting for followers to see. These focus issues included public garbage bins, chicken coops, and composting. Regular wildlife activity updates were also noted in these posts and publications to make the public aware of current human-wildlife conflicts and the root cause of these conflicts to provide context for a better understanding of specific wildlife behaviour. The wildlife activity updates gained the most responses from the public.

Wildlife in Area Signs

In 2021, Bamfield Community Affairs Grants in Aid Society provided funding to support the purchase of educational wildlife signs for Bamfield and Anacla. These signs included permanent metal signs for proper disposal of fish refuse off of docks, garbage disposal, wildlife safety when camping, and general wildlife in area signs. Customized signs were designed to include Huu-ay-aht language and a territory acknowledgement. Due to some unexpected delays the signs are still being completed by a printer and have not yet been installed.

A new grant was awarded this September from the Bamfield Community Affairs Grants in Aid Society. This money was allocated towards the purchase of temporary wildlife-in-area signs (bear and cougar) as well as dock signs. These additional signs will be helpful in informing the public when there is concerning cougars or bears activity in the area.

WildSafeBC Business Pledge

The WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to set good examples in their community for how to safely co-exist with wildlife. To take the pledge, a business is required to follow best practices in solid waste management, provide adequate training to staff and support WildSafeBC safety and conflict reduction information. In return, WildSafeBC will provide ongoing support to the business in the form of staff training, WildSafeBC materials (subject to budget constraints) and a WildSafeBC Business Pledge poster. One business, Argo's Landing, committed to the Business Pledge in the 2021 season. There are two other businesses that have shown an interest in completing this process for the 2023 season.

WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

Through the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program, the WCC is able to provide clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. A wildlife hazard assessment was carried out at the Eileen Scott Campground in 2020 and Pachena Bay Campground in 2021 and 2022. The Bamfield Parks Board have enacted a number of the recommendations for the Eileen Scott Campground already and have expressed an interest in purchasing a shipping container to store campers' food, coolers and fish freezers for 2023. Pachena Bay Campground has indicated that they will be moving forward with the Bare Campsite Program at their site and they plan to complete the online WildSafeBC Bare Campsite training with their staff.

WildSafeBC Cost-Share Program

A cost-share program was developed in order to support community access to bear-resistant or predator-exclusion products. This program helps reduce the financial barriers to adopting WildSafeBC practices by making these products more affordable. Funding was obtained from the Bamfield Community Affairs Grants in Aid Program in 2022.

A grant of \$1,000 was allocated to cover fifty percent of the cost (up to \$250 per product) of certified bear-resistant products purchased by community members. These products include bear-resistant garbage bins, composters and electric fencing. This year the program has subsidized the purchase of two Jora composters so far. There were a number of people that inquired about purchasing Jora composters but found them cost prohibitive even with the subsidy. There were three orders pending at the end of the 2022 season; one Jora composter and two poly-carts.

A number of businesses and individuals have expressed an interest in purchasing shipping containers to store attractants in for next year. Below is a copy of the advertising that was used to promote the cost-share program (Figure 6).

Bamfield cost-share program to help secure bear attractants is back by popular demand



WildSafeBC has funding to help support the purchase of certified bear-resistant products in Bamfield.

We will cover 50% of the cost of electric fencing, bear-resistant bins and composters.

Funds are limited.

To apply please contact your local WildSafeBC coordinator at Bamfield@WildSafeBC.com or 250-720-1808



Keeping wildlife wild and communities safe www.wildsafebc.com

Figure 6. Advertisement for the cost-share program.

Challenges and Opportunities

Public Garbage Bins

Non-bear-resistant public garbage bins were the main attractant that led to food conditioning in bears last year and again this year. The majority of commercial garbage bins in Bamfield and Anacla were either non-bear-resistant and or bear-resistant but non-functioning due to damage. Bears were seen regularly climbing into the broken bins at the Parks Canada trailhead and in lower Anacla. These food-conditioned bears moved into the campsites area looking for food and even accessing vehicles. Efforts were made by the WCC to have the area waste management company replace or fix the bins, but by the time two of the main problem bins were replaced a number of bears had already become food conditioned.

All garbage bins in Bamfield and Anacla need to be bear-resistant and in working order. User compliance is also key to ensuring these bins are bear-resistant. Metal bear bars must be secured by carabiners in order for the bins to be bear-resistant. Carabiners which were supplied last year went missing over the winter because they were not secured to the bins. The WCC provided carabiners with eyeholes and secured them to all of the bins this season to avoid this issue going forward.

There were additional challenges with the public making use of existing bear-bars and carabiners when these securing devices were not missing or damaged. Efforts were made by the WCC to educate people about securing the bins. An infographic decal, explaining how and why to secure the bear-bars, was placed on every bin (Figure 7-A, 7-B). There is no direct oversight of the bins to ensure that they are secured properly, particularly after they have been emptied biweekly. The Huu-ay-aht First Nation put out a posting asking residents to secure the bins with the carabiners provided (Figure 7-C). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the bins are not locked by the waste company truck drivers after the bins have been emptied.



Figure 7. A) Examples of infographics to encourage people to secure bins securely. B) Decal on bin C) Notice that the Huu-ay-aht First Nation sent out to Anacla Citizens.

The majority of the bins in town do not have bear-bars and therefore cannot be secured properly. Figures 8-A, 8-B and 8-C show two of the main models of non-bear-resistant bins in Bamfield and Anacla. Neither of these models have bear bars across the top of them. Without the bear-bars, bears are able to bend the corners of the lid and gain access to the garbage. Additionally the chains that the carabiners are attached to are not designed to withstand the strength of a bear (Figure 9-D).



Figure 8. A & B) Photo of front and backside of non-bear-resistant bin model without bear-resistant bars in Bamfield and Anacla. C) Photo of side view and front view of non-bear-resistant bin model without bear-resistant bars in Bamfield and Anacla. D) Photo of failed carabiner/chain securing mechanism due to damage.

Transfer Station Electric Fence

The ACRD replaced the temporary electric fence around the transfer station with a new permanent electric fence installed by Margo Supplies (Figure 9). The new fence has 6 strands, 5 hotwires and 1 cold wire at the bottom. The gate that was previously not electrified now has two strands of electric fencing at the top. The gate latch which was difficult for people to properly lock has been replaced with an easy-to-use drop pin lock system to help reduce user error (Figure 10).



Figure 9. Transfer station gate showing Bear in Area signs and warnings to keep garbage secure and with electric fence installation.



Figure 10. A) Wire connection now made with the gate to better secure the Transfer Station area. B) New drop pin setup for gate at the transfer station.

Fish refuse and compost

There was significantly more fish refuse and compost seen washed up in the intertidal this year. New signage was placed at some docks and efforts were made to educate people at those locations. There are no regulations in place that specifically discourage people from disposing fish refuse in intertidal areas. Fish refuse in the intertidal is likely one of the main attractants bringing bears and cougars into the center of town. Once in town the likelihood of bears and cougars accessing attractants and remaining in the area significantly increases. This leads to a higher likelihood of human-wildlife conflicts to occur in the community.

Compost

There were numerous reports to the WCC of compost washing up in the intertidal and also composters being accessed by bears. The increased interest in composting in Bamfield is leading to this being a common issue for residents and local wildlife. Unfortunately, people have found an ideal composter to be cost prohibitive, even with the subsidy program. The majority of the people that the WCC talked with about composting would like access to a Bear Smart composter, be it a privately obtained or a publicly provided one.

Brady's Beach

As in previous years, time was spent educating campers at the unofficial campsites on Brady's Beach. There is no place for campers to safely store food and garbage and no signage is posted nearby to help campers make "Bear Smart" decisions. Since Brady's Beach is on Crown Land, and there is no official oversight, the WCC regularly visited campers throughout the season to educate them about Bare Campsite guidelines.

Community Trail Building

A new network of trails is being developed throughout the community. Some of these trails provide new access to sensitive ecological areas which are seasonal feeding grounds for bears. Educational signage, seasonal warning signs, and trail design, are all important factors that should be considered in order to help reduce unwanted and or negative human-bear interactions.

One of the big challenges faced by the coordinator is the reluctance of the community to call the COS RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) when there is a negative bear interaction or when there are cougar sightings. Early identification of conflict behaviour is important because it allows the COS and the WCC to intervene early on and help mitigate any of the underlying causes of conflict and to more accurately assess wildlife behaviour. The WCC continues to share with residents in the community the importance of contacting the COS early before animals become food conditioned and habituated to humans and urban areas. Unfortunately, only a fraction of the people who witnessed negative interactions with bears or cougars made reports to the RAPP line this season. This once again demonstrates the need to continue work fostering trust between the community and the Conservation Officer Service.

Recommendations

Some recommended areas of focus for WildSafeBC Bamfield program in 2023 include:

- Ensuring that all commercial bins are bear-resistant
- Educating public about securing public bins with carabiners
- Education campaign focusing on attractant management, particularly fish cleaning stations and composting
- Continued efforts to encourage use of the RAPP line
- Continued promotion of the cost-sharing program
- Promotion of the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program initiative
- Develop a Human-Bear/Wildlife Conflict Management Plan
- Help the community develop Bear Smart guidelines for Brady's Beach

Continued engagement with the community and the development of a strong human-wildlife conflict management plan will help ensure that our growing community will be able to evolve while improving our ability to coexist with wildlife without negatively impacting local wildlife species.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Alberni Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD), British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF), Bamfield Community Affairs, and the Province of BC for the generous support of the WildSafeBC Bamfield Program. A big thank you to Jenny Brunn, Paulo Eichelberger and Brenda Sauve from the ACRD for their continued and extended support. I would also like to thank our local Conservation Officers Dan Eichstadter, Caitlin Bickford, Andrew Riddell and Stewart Bates for the tireless efforts to help prevent human-wildlife conflict. It is important to thank the communities of Anacla and Bamfield for their continual efforts to help our community coexist with the local wildlife. We continue to work to “keep wildlife wild and communities safe.”