

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

## Bella Coola

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## Executive Summary

This report has been compiled to provide an overview of WildSafeBC activities and achievements during the field season from December 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022. All activities were undertaken in the Bella Coola valley area, within the unceded territory of Nuxalkmc (Figure 1).

This season has witnessed another notable decrease in reported human-bear conflict incidents. While the destruction of numerous bears in response to conflict in the 2019 and 2020 seasons are likely a continuing factor, improvements in salmon returns, sufficient berry production and an increase in community attractant awareness, will all have contributed as well. Valley residents continue to invest in electric fencing through the ongoing Bella Coola Valley Tourism cost-share initiative and are positively engaged in installing fencing for the purposes of preventing conflict. Collaborative efforts between WildSafeBC and the Bella Coola Foodshed Alliance (previously the Bella Coola Valley Sustainable Agricultural Society) to promote the use of fencing for food security and human-bear conflict mitigation appears to have also been well received by a larger audience in the valley.

The impacts of COVID-19 are now minimal in the valley and many public events restarted this year including weekly farmers' markets, the Bella Coola Music Festival, and Fall Fair. The valley welcomed many national and international tourists during the summer, and while bear-viewing activities remain popular, Bella Coola Valley Tourism has begun efforts to diversify tourism and attract tourists to other activities (e.g. Nuxalk petroglyph tours). WildSafeBC Bella Coola contributed to the new Bella Coola Tourism Guide with wildlife awareness and safety information.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community and increasing tolerance of bears. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the season:

- 1 WildSafe Ranger presentation and 16 youth reached
- 5 display booths and 271 people reached
- 23 Facebook posts (excluding posts shared from Provincial page) and 166 new Facebook page followers joined over the 2022 season.

The WCC also completed the new Bear Hazard Assessment (BHA) including contributions from the social survey undertaken last season, and drafted a Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan for the program area. An infographic for the BHA was also created and shared across the valley. The WCC also became co-chair of the Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety Committee and has facilitated meetings, drafted meeting minutes and summaries for public reading, and created a Facebook group for sharing group meeting minutes and general information with local valley residents.



The WCC was able to continue the grizzly bear habitat use survey over the winter period with thanks to continued funding from Ministry of Forests, gathering invaluable data on other species. Numerous species previously undetected and/or with minimal information regarding occurrence in the valley have now been confirmed including:

- Fisher (*Pekania pennanti*)
- Roosevelt elk (*Cervus canadensis roosevelti*)
- Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*)
- Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*)

Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”. We give our respect, gratitude and thanks to the Nuxalkmc, the Smayusta and the Band Council for their continued support and leadership. Stutwiniitscw.

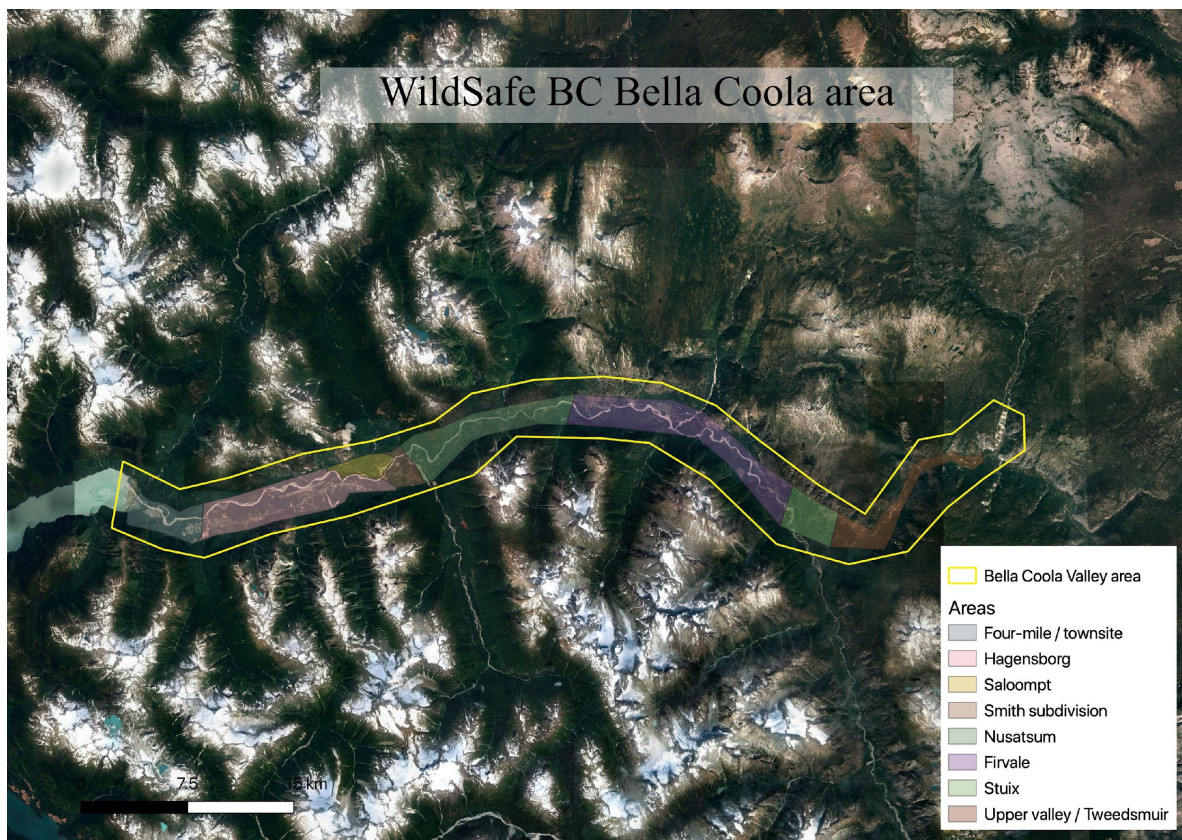


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Bella Coola program coverage area.

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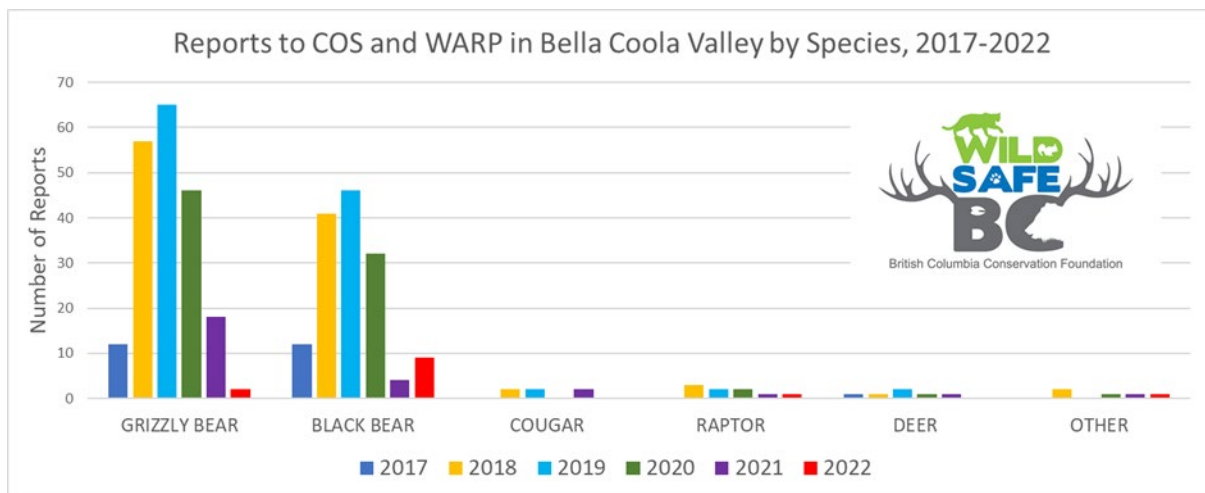
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**Cover Photo: Tree rubbing by a large grizzly bear captured with a camera trap setup.**

## Highlights from the 2022 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 the WildSafeBC Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). This data is updated daily and this report for Bella Coola includes data from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022 (Figure 2). Overall reports for all species were notably lower in 2022 compared with previous seasons (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP by species from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.**

There were 2 grizzly bear reports and 9 black bear reports this season. This is by far the lowest year for black and grizzly bear since 2016 when the program began in the area (Figure 2). Part of this decrease in reports could be attributed to the community taking on and implementing better attractant management practices due to the several years of WildSafeBC active work with residents and visitors.

Black bear reports were highest in August, September and October (Figure 3). The increase in reports in the fall follows expected seasonal trends as bears enter a period of extreme eating called hyperphagia, to prepare for winter denning.

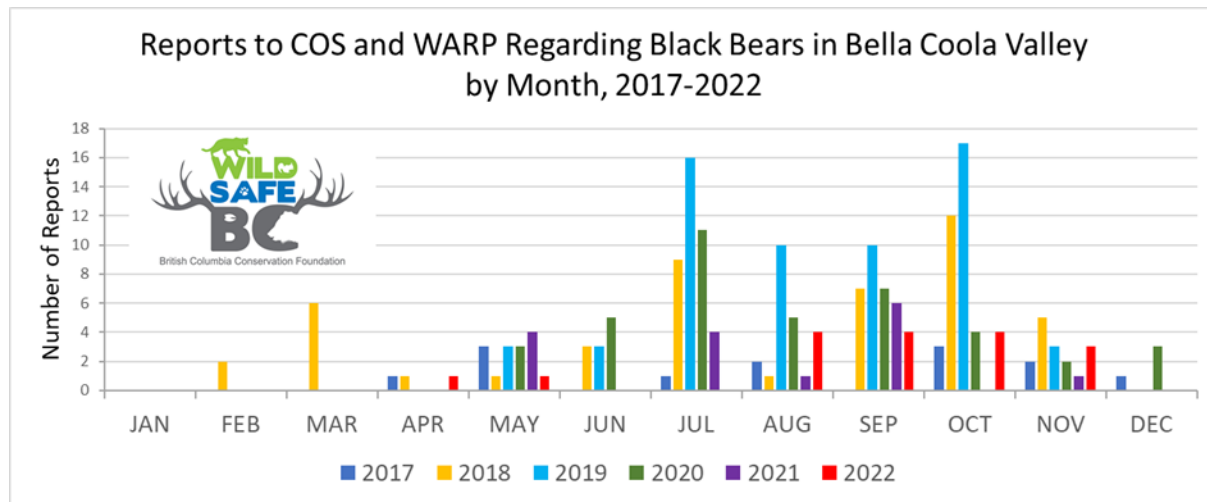


Figure 3. Monthly black bear reports to the COS and WARP from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

## WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. This season the Bella Coola Elementary School participated in the WRP through an indoor presentation. There were 16 children that became WildSafe Rangers and received a WildSafe Ranger kit to take home. The intent of these kits is to encourage further discussion about wildlife awareness and attractant management with their families.

## Display Booths

The WCC held 5 booths throughout the season that were well received and helped increase engagement with the community (Table 1). Booths were themed around general introduction to the WildSafeBC program and human-wildlife coexistence (Figure 5).

Table 1. Display booths held during the 2022 season.

Location	Purpose	Date	People reached
Bella Coola Harbour	General promotion	12-Jun-22	29
Farmers Market	General promotion	19-Jun-22	40
Farmers Market	General promotion	10-Jul-22	76
Bella Coola Music Festival	General promotion	16-Jul-22	54
Farmers Market	General promotion & electric fencing demo	18-Sep-22	72





Figure 4. Display booths setup in the community

## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Bella Coola Facebook page increased its followers from 563 to 729 (23%) over the course of the 2022 season. The program was also featured in *Coast Mountain News*, advertising the start of the new season and a piece was submitted and published regarding the results of the Bear Hazard Assessment - <https://www.coastmountainnews.com/news/70-of-residents-dont-report-bears-to-cos-in-bella-coola-survey/> (Figure 6). The WCC was a guest on Nuxalk Radio twice with radio host Sheldon Tallio where they discussed attractant management, bear ecology, and conservation.

# 70 % of residents don't report bears to COS in Bella Coola: Survey

May. 30, 2022 5:00 p.m. / [LOCAL NEWS](#) / [NEWS](#)

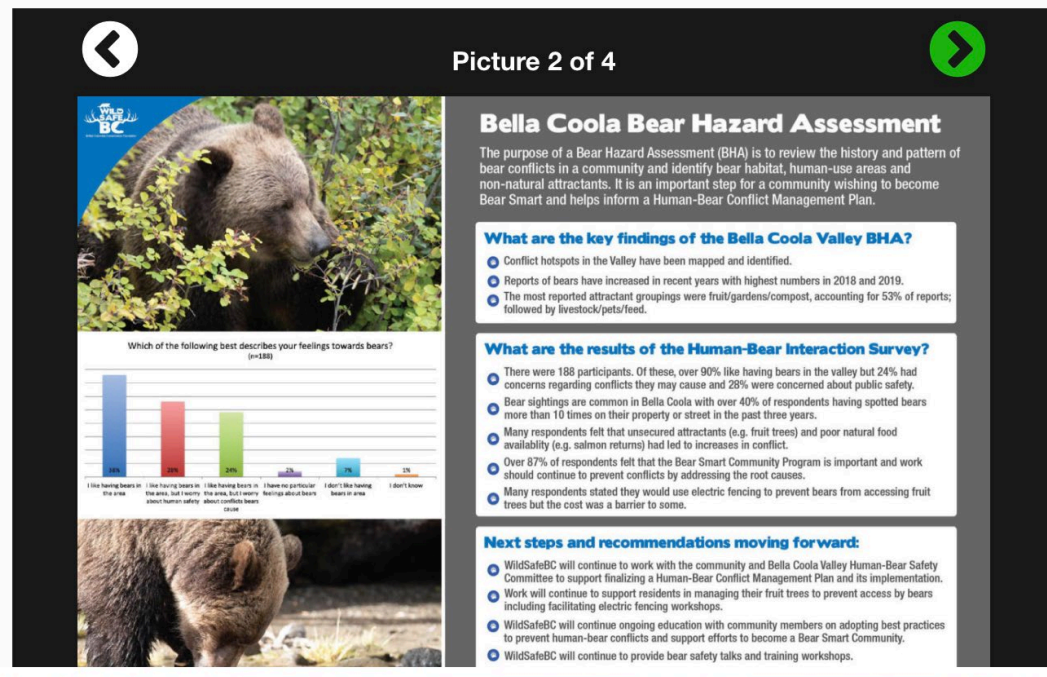


Figure 5. Coast Mountain News piece on Bear Hazard Assessment results.

## Collaborations

The WCC worked closely with the Bella Coola Foodshed Alliance in helping promote their fruit-gleaning program as a human-bear conflict reduction action for residents.

The WCC provided Bella Coola Valley Tourism (BCVT) with content for a new edition of the Bella Coola Valley Tourism guide regarding wildlife safety. The WCC continued to provide support to BCVT with their electric fencing cost-share program. The WCC and the new BCVT president have been in dialogue ongoing regarding media pieces for valley residents and tourists to produce content for the 2023 season.



The WCC was made co-chair of the Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety Committee alongside Lori Homstol and has been managing on an alternating basis meeting agendas and minutes. The WCC has taken on the responsibility of drafting and disseminating meeting summaries for public reading via a dedicated Facebook group page and by posting printouts to public notice boards across the valley.

## Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC continued to foster important, respectful relationships with Nuxalkmc through all program activities. The WCC has been urging the financial support and the creation of a traditional cedar box for housing a grizzly bear pelt currently owned by BC Parks and used by the WCC at display booths.

## Special Initiatives

With continued funding from the Ministry of Forests the WildSafeBC program was able to maintain deployed camera traps, as part of the grizzly bear habitat use survey. Data is gathered in video format and has been used to engage the public through social media posts and during display booths with great success.

## Challenges and Opportunities

The BCVT electric fence cost-share program has been very well received by most however, shortfalls have been noted. Recipients are not always encouraged to install fences following bear-resistant guidelines and installations are not followed up upon after equipment is provided. The WCC has been working closely with Tom Hermance, who is facilitating the initiative, with information regarding installation guidelines to share with all recipients. The WCC has also visited a number of residences prior to them purchasing equipment from BCVT and has assisted with design considerations and installation layout. BCVT has reported eight installations this season.

It has become apparent there is an urgent need for electric fence contractors in the valley to assist those unable to install fencing on their own. Funding and logistical constraints prevented a workshop being held this season with interested contractors and it is hoped such an event can be held next season.

The WCC is grateful for an unrestricted donation from Tweedsmuir Lodge and Bella Coola Heli Skiing to contribute to program activities for the 2023 season.

## Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to acknowledge and thank the following people and organizations that supported the WildSafeBC Bella Coola Program in 2022: Sheldon Tallio, Jason Moody, Sam Schooner, Bella Coola Foodshed Alliance, Elizabeth Howard, Harvey Thomassen, Bob Lenci, Leah Moody, Steve Hodgeson, Henrik Rassmussen, Ivy Mutiso, Vicki Sahanatien, Kris Everatt,

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BCParks, Bella Coola Valley Tourism, Tom Hermance, Tweedsmuir Park Lodge & Bella Coola Heli Skiing, Sir Alexander Mackenzie Secondary School, Bella Coola Elementary School, Lori Homstol, Rae Busse, COS, Garth Mowat, Shelley Marshall, Grant MacHutchon, Phoenix Café, House of Smayutsa, and the Nuxalk Nation. WildSafeBC is grateful for program funding provided by the Province of BC and for the ongoing support of the BC Conservation Foundation.