

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

Central Okanagan

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the activities and achievements of the WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Program between May 8th and November 30th, 2022. The WildSafeBC Central Okanagan program area covers the communities of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, Peachland and areas service by the Regional District of Central Okanagan curbside collection program (Figure 1). The WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Program respectfully acknowledges this land as the unceded traditional territory of the syilx/okanagan Peoples.

This year, a total of 2,026 species were reported to the Conservation Officer Service which is on average from the past 6 years. Of these, 1,454 species reports were in the Central Okanagan and 572 in Okanagan Westside. In the Central Okanagan, deer (n= 620) were the most reported species, followed by black bears (n=526). In Okanagan Westside, black bears (n=276) were the most reported species followed by deer (n=205).

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

- 25 WildSafe Ranger Programs delivered as both webinars and classroom presentations, with over 700 youth reached
- Two presentations given to a community group and to RDCO staff for a total of 51 participants
- 279 people reached through door-to-door canvassing; 53 in person and 226 door hangers left
- 12 bin tagging routes and 653 bins tagged
- 13 display booths held at community events and over 1,350 people reached
- 14 businesses were contacted and introduced to the Business Pledge Program; 1 business expressed interest to know more
- 12 campgrounds were contacted and introduced to the Bare Campsite Program
- 79 Facebook posts, over 25,000 reach and 60 new Facebook page followers from May 16 to November 30, 2022

The WCC collaborated with two different strata/community association communities and engaged with seven different Facebook communities to provide information to residents on specific wildlife activity relevant attractant management information, such as deer and gardens, bears and garbage, and cougar/coyote and pet safety. As well, the WCC continued to identify and communicate opportunities and recommendations for Bear Smart initiatives to program sponsors, such as wildlife attractant bylaws.

Challenges around attractant management, especially in relation to garbage and fruit trees, continued in Central Okanagan communities. To address this, WildSafeBC should continue outreach activities and support program sponsors in implementing Bear Smart initiatives. Moving forward, these initiatives and partnerships will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe.”

Thank you to the BC Conservation Foundation, Province of British Columbia, City of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation (WFN), District of Peachland, and the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) for funding and supporting the program. The WCC sincerely appreciates the commitment of program volunteers and collaborators.

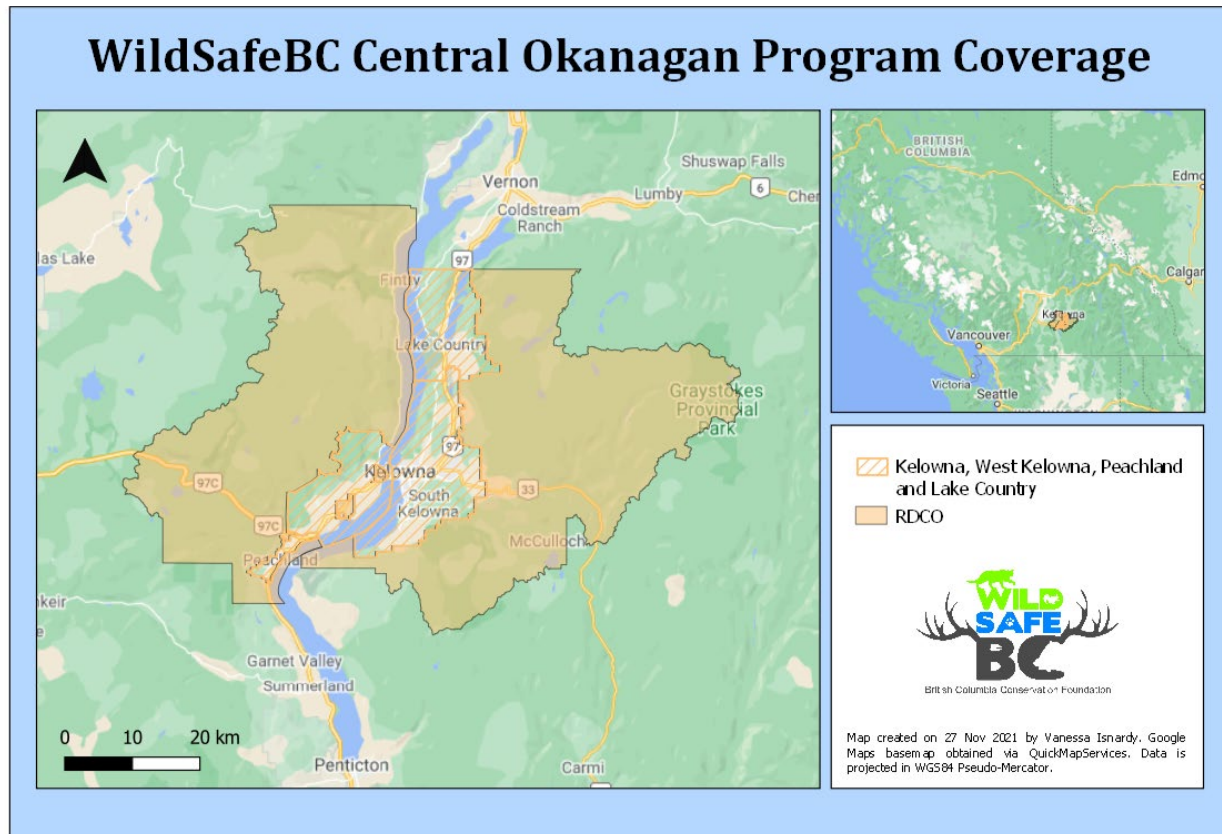


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Central Okanagan program coverage area.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2022 Season	5
Wildlife Activity	5
WildSafe Ranger Program.....	9
Presentations to Community Groups	10
Display Booths	10
Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging	13
Social Media and Press.....	14
Wildlife in Area Signs.....	16
Collaborations	16
Special Initiatives.....	16
Challenges and Opportunities	17
Acknowledgements.....	18

Table of Figures

Figure 1. WildSafeBC Central Okanagan program coverage area.	2
Figure 2. Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) by region in Central Okanagan communities from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.....	5
Figure 3. Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) by species in Central Okanagan communities from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.....	6
Figure 4. Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) by species in Okanagan Westside communities from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.....	6
Figure 5. Black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) in Central Okanagan communities by month from January 1, 2017 – November 26, 2022.	7
Figure 6. Black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) in Okanagan Westside communities by month from January 1, 2017 – November 26, 2022.	7
Figure 8. The WCC gives a WildSafe Ranger Program Presentation to Watson Rd Elementary school (left) and sensisyusten house of learning (right).....	9

Table 1. Central Okanagan schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2022.	9
Table 2. Okanagan Westside schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2022.	10
Table 3. Central Okanagan Community Events that WCC attended in 2022.	11
Table 4. Okanagan Westside Community Events that WCC attended in 2022.	11
Figure 9. The poops n'prints game at the WildSafeBC booth.	12
Figure 10. The materials such as brochures, infographics, and wildlife props provided at the WildSafeBC booth.	12
Figure 11. The WCC leaving an educational door hanger package to provide attractant management information on species of interest in neighbourhood.	13
Figure 12. The WCC placing an educational warning sticker on garbage bins placed out before collection day.	13
Table 5. Media stories that involved WildSafeBC in 2022.	15
Figure 13. A West Kelowna bear-in-area sign, in an area the WCC was bin tagging.	16

Cover Photo: Lauren Wishart, WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Coordinator at the BC Goes Wild/RDCO Parks Kokanee Event at Mission Creek Regional Park. Photo Credit: Katie Wishart

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 report includes data for Central Okanagan from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022 and data for Okanagan Westside from January 1, 2017 to November 3, 2022 (Figure 2). Deer were the most reported species in Central Okanagan communities, with 670 reports in 2022 (Figure 3). They are followed by black bears, with 536 reports. Coyotes and cougars were the distant third and fourth reported species, with 108 and 73 reports respectively. Black bears continued to be the most reported species in the Westside Okanagan communities, with 276 reports in 2022 (Figure 4). Deer were the second most reported species with 205 reports this year. Coyotes and cougars were third and fourth reported species, with 27 and 19 reports respectively.

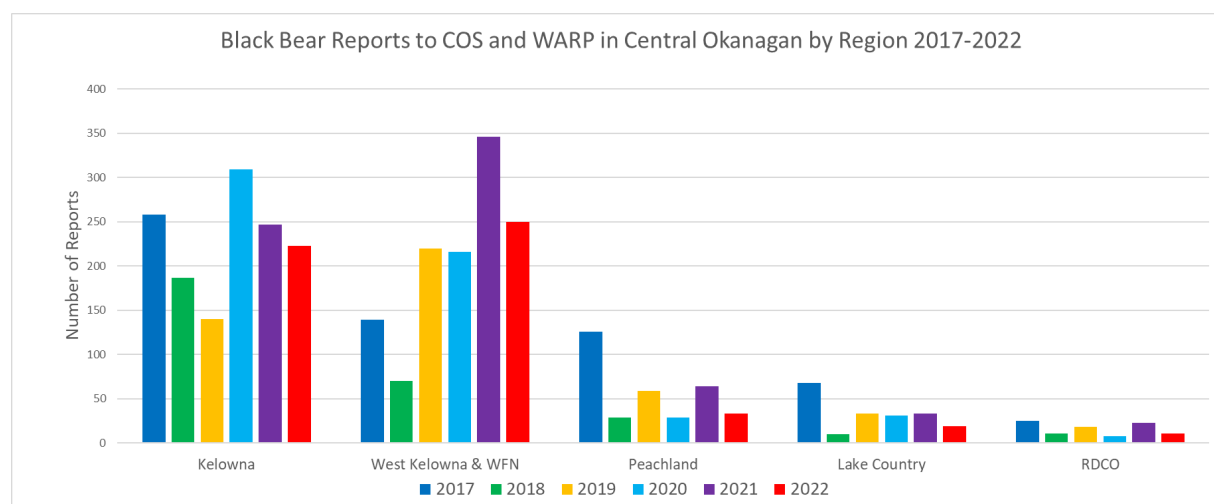


Figure 2. Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) by region in Central Okanagan communities from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

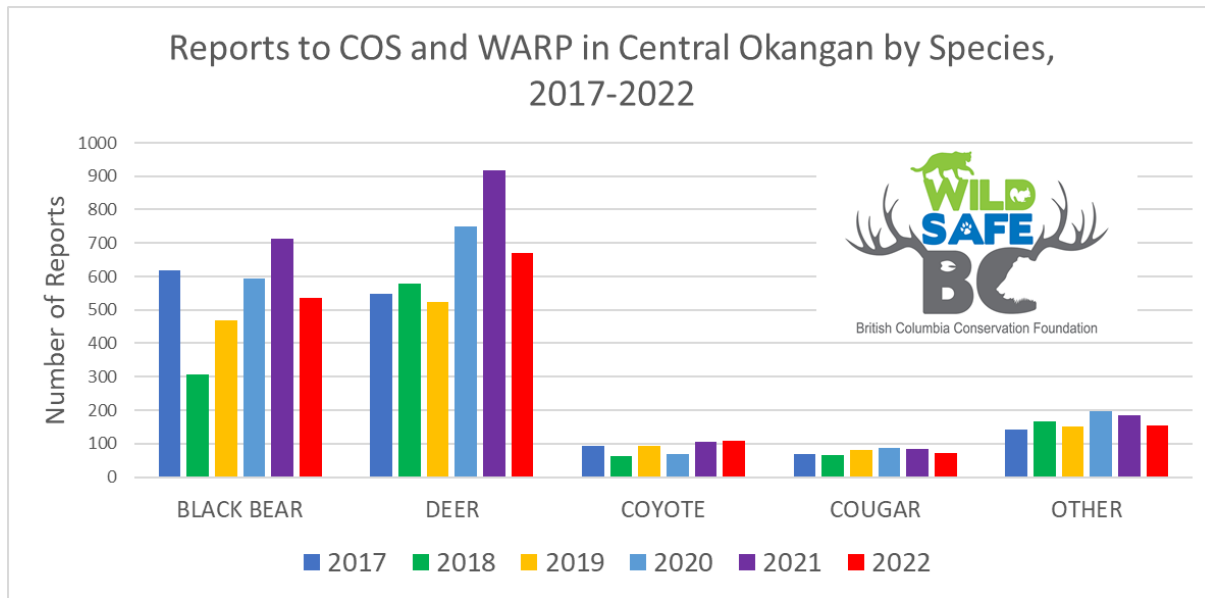


Figure 3. Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) by species in Central Okanagan communities from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

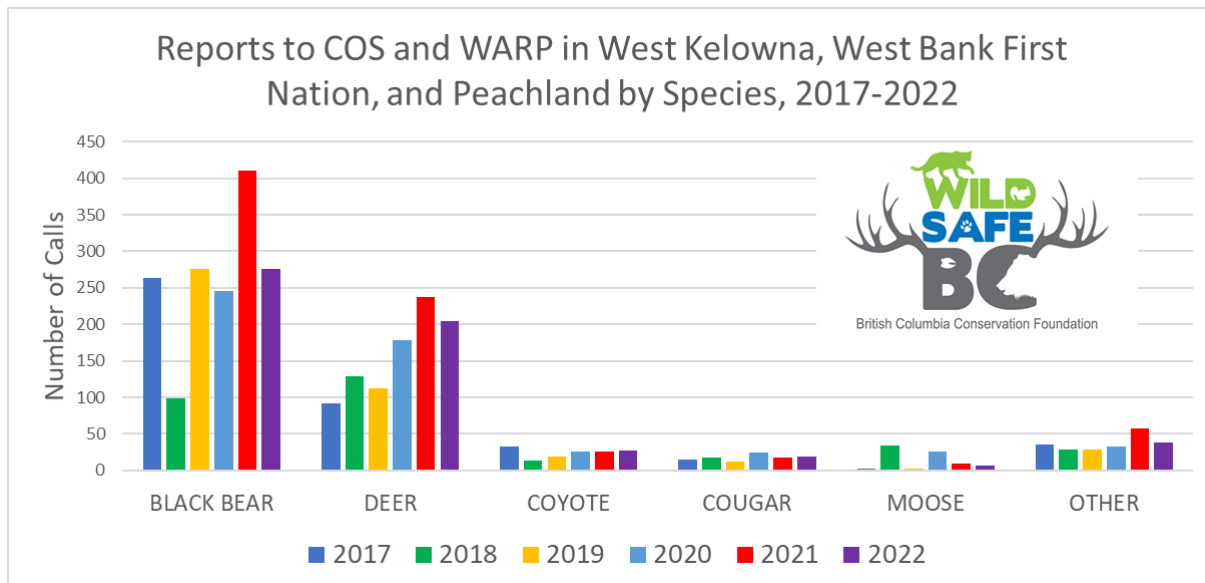


Figure 4. Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) by species in Okanagan Westside communities from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

In both Central Okanagan and Okanagan Westside communities, black bear reports were higher than average this spring due to the late spring weather, which reduced the natural food availability in the mountains and kept bears closer to the communities in search of easier but unnatural food sources (Figures 5 and 6). In July, when the weather reached higher temperatures the black bear activity decreased as more natural food was available away from urban areas. Black bear reports stayed low throughout the summer and until fall when it is normal to see an increase of bear activity during their preparation for winter months.

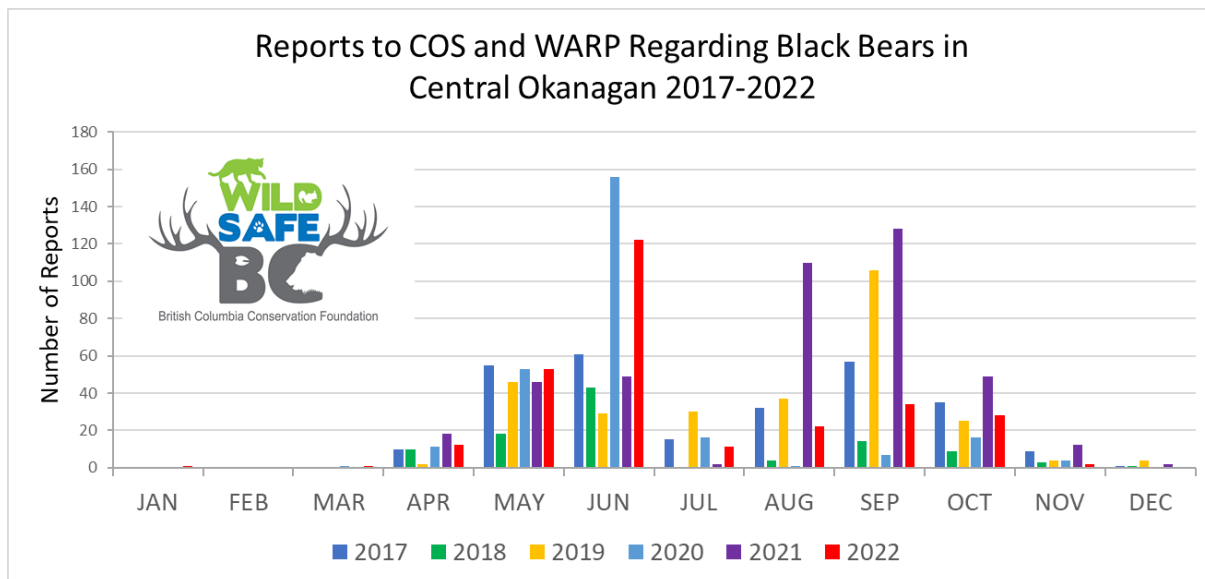


Figure 5. Black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) in Central Okanagan communities by month from January 1, 2017 – November 26, 2022.

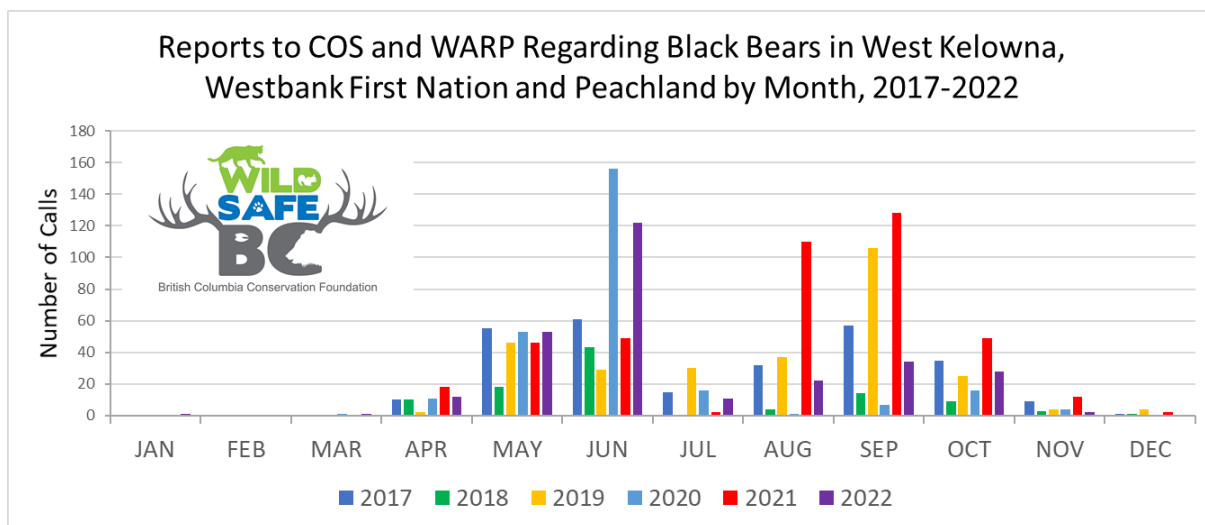


Figure 6. Black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) in Okanagan Westside communities by month from January 1, 2017 – November 26, 2022.

A contributing factor in human-bear conflicts is the presence and availability of attractants. While climate conditions cannot be controlled, management of attractants can be. Measures like wildlife attractant bylaws and the continued roll-out of the certified bear-resistant RDCO garbage bins, address and reduce the prevalence of unsecured garbage and are essential to prevent increases in the number of human-bear conflicts in Central Okanagan communities. Through conversations with residents of the communities, there seems to be a misconception on why

reporting to the Conservation Officer Service is important and many seem to avoid reporting out of fear that the bear will end up destroyed.

In Central Okanagan communities, deer were the most reported species this season, 5% higher than the average (Figure 3). In the Okanagan Westside communities, deer were the second most reported species this season, 36% higher than the average (Figure 4). Both communities continued to show an increasing trend over the last six years of deer reports. Human-deer conflicts included garden and landscaping damage, increased potential for vehicle-deer collisions, encounters with aggressive or defensive deer (especially during fawning season when dogs are involved), deer getting injured or impaled on fences, and attraction of large predators into urban areas as they followed deer. The WCC noticed in the 2022 season that large numbers of deer reports involved congregation of urban deer in mobile home parks or strata communities where deer can successfully forage and raise their offspring in areas predators are less likely to enter. Some problems regarding these strata titled communities are that residents don't have full control over their landscaping or fencing choices. Going forward, continued conversations with strata councils and residents to further educate people on proper attractant management and human-deer conflict mitigation may be helpful.

Other human-wildlife conflicts to consider is the lack of knowledge around domestic pet safety and attractant management to keep out predators such as coyotes and cougars. In Central Okanagan communities, coyote reports were 13% higher than the average and cougar reports were 8% lower than the average, for the last 6 years (Figure 3). In Okanagan Westside communities, coyote reports were 14% higher than the average and cougar reports were 8% higher than the average, over the last 6 years (Figure 4). This 2022 season, the WCC had several reports of domestic pets getting attacked or killed by coyotes and cougars. Cougars and coyotes may prey on pets on nature trails or even in residential areas, especially when pets are off leash. Further education and awareness should be a focus in future seasons, specifically focused on strategies such as keeping pets supervised and on a leash when outdoors, how to stay safe in an encounter, the importance of carrying bear spray, keeping pets indoors especially at dawn, dusk or night, and additional attractant management tips.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict (Figure 8). In the Central Okanagan, a total of five schools/organizations participated in the WRP presentations this year, and 556 students became WildSafe Rangers (Table 1). In the Okanagan Westside, a total of five schools/organizations participated in the WRP presentations this year, and 144 students became WildSafe Rangers (Table 2). Each of these students received WildSafe Ranger Kits, including activity book, wildlife brochure of species of interest, bookmark, sticker, badge/tattoo, oath card and an at-home activity/colouring sheet connected to our on-going WildSafe Ranger Colouring Contest.



Figure 8. The WCC gives a WildSafe Ranger Program Presentation to Watson Rd Elementary school (left) and sensisusten house of learning (right).

Table 1. Central Okanagan schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2022.

School	Grade	Students
Spring Valley Middle School	7	200
BC SPCA	3-6, K-2	27
Watson Rd Elementary	2, 3, 4	147
Davidson Rd Elementary	2	44
South Kelowna Elementary	K, 1, 2, 3, 4	138
TOTAL		556

Table 2. Okanagan Westside schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2022.

School/Organization	Grade	Students
Peachland Library	Elementary	20
WFN Summer Camp	Pre K-7	13
We Think Outside Homeschool	Pre K-3	10
sənsisɣustən House of Learning	K-2, 3-5	50
Shannon Lake Elementary	K	51
TOTAL		144

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave three presentations to community groups in the Central Okanagan. One such presentation was provided to the Central Okanagan Naturalist Club about bear spray and bear safety and had 28 participants. Two other presentations were given to the RDCO about bear spray and bear safety with a total of 23 participants.

In the Okanagan Westside, there were no community presentations this season. However, in both communities, the WCC also gave various condensed versions of bear spray workshops to interested groups at community events such as farmers markets. These condensed bear spray workshops included information on recognizing wildlife behaviour, provided citizens a chance to hold inert bear spray and understand the mechanisms used to deploy the spray, and when and how to discharge bear spray using the “S.P.R.A.Y.” acronym.

Display Booths

In the Central Okanagan, the WCC held 9 display booths at community events, reaching a total of 816 people (Table 3). In the Okanagan Westside, the WCC held 5 display booths at community events, reaching a total of 535 people (Table 4). These events provide an opportunity for the WCC to introduce residents and tourists to WildSafeBC messaging as well as make connections with local businesses and community organizations also involved with the event.

Table 3. Central Okanagan Community Events that WCC attended in 2022.

Event	Date	Number of People Reached
Parks Day	July 16, 2022	63
Welcome Kokanee	August 27, 2022	97
Kikanee Festival + BC Goes Wild Event	July 10, 2022	286
East Kelowna Market	August 21, 2022	77
Lake Country Market	September 9, 2022	67
RDCO Waste Recycling Pop-up	September 17, 2022	25
Kelowna Farmers Market	Sept 7, 2022	80
East Kelowna Fall Market	Sept 10, 2022	121
TOTAL		816

Table 4. Okanagan Westside Community Events that WCC attended in 2022.

Event	Date	Number of People Reached
siya Celebration	June 10, 2022	120
Westside Daze	July 9, 2022	207
Peachland Farmers Market	July 10, 2022	92
Westbank Farmers Market	Sept 24, 2022	60
Grizzli Winery Thanksgiving Market	Oct 1, 2022	56
TOTAL		535

The WildSafeBC booth display included the popular poops n'prints game, where participants match wildlife scat and prints to the relevant animals. The game is designed to increase wildlife identification skills and bring awareness to safety practices when out on the trails (Figure 9). The booth also provided locals with knowledge of wildlife in the area through infographics and wildlife props such as a bear skull, claws, and paw (Figure 10). Booth displays focus on how to stay safe when on the trails through understanding wildlife behaviour, trail etiquette, and bear spray use as well as on how to manage attractants in our homes to keep wildlife wild and communities safe.



Figure 9. The poops n'prints game at the WildSafeBC booth.



Figure 10. The materials such as brochures, infographics, and wildlife props provided at the WildSafeBC booth.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education consisted of leaving door hangers and letters of information about human-wildlife conflicts occurring in the neighbourhood (Figure 11). In the Central Okanagan, through door-to-door education, 8 households were reached with door hangers, and 28 people were further reached during in-person conversations. In the Okanagan Westside, 148 households were reached with door hangers, and 30 people were further reached during in-person conversations. The locations for door-to-door canvassing were determined based on reports made to WARP, wildlife reports on local Facebook community pages, and recommendations by sponsor contacts and local Conservation Officers.



Figure 11. The WCC leaving an educational door hanger package to provide attractant management information on species of interest in neighbourhood.

Garbage bin tagging is an educational activity which consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on bins set curbside the night before garbage collection (Figure 12).



Figure 12. The WCC placing an educational warning sticker on garbage bins placed out before collection day.

In Central Okanagan, there were 7 distinct routes, and 1 repeated, with a total of 414 bins receiving stickers. Only 8 of the bins tagged on repeated routes, had to be stickered twice which demonstrates the effectiveness of this activity in changing human behaviours. The WCC started a new partnership with the City of Kelowna Bylaw Department to send out educational letters to all Kelowna homes observed on first passes to have placed garbage bins out early.

Furthermore, the City of Kelowna Bylaw sends a bylaw officer to visit locations where they received stickers more than once. The WCC also began working with the District of Lake Country bylaw to develop a similar working relationship.

In Okanagan Westside, there were 5 distinct routes, and 2 repeated routes, for a total of 223 bins tagged. Only 8 of the bins tagged on repeated routes, had to be stickered twice. The WCC continued to partner with the City of West Kelowna Bylaw Department, to send educational letters to all West Kelowna homes observed on first passes to have placed garbage bins out early. The WCC also established a working relationship with the City of West Kelowna bylaw for them to send a bylaw officer to visit locations where they received stickers more than once. The WCC partnered with the Westbank First Nation to send out educational letters to all homes that had bins placed out before collection day instead of using bin tags to deliver the messaging. Also new this year, the WCC partnered with the District of Peachland bylaw department to send out educational letters to second offenders that were observed on the second bin tagging survey.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Facebook page grew 65% from 583 to 891 page followers from the following season to November 30, 2022. The page had an excellent reach with over 25,000 people interacting with more than 75 posts that were created. The posts with the highest reach were the ones alerting residents to wildlife in neighbourhoods. The posts with the highest engagement all involved the topic of bears. For important topics, regarding current wildlife alerts and safety, the WCC would tag or request the community sponsors share the posts to their social media pages.

Monitoring of community Facebook pages for neighbourhoods within the program area provided valuable insight on wildlife activity within these areas, as activity would often be reported here and not to the COS. Pictures and videos of bears posted to social media also assisted to provide valuable information about the bears in the community including location, behaviours and number of individuals. These community pages were also good locations to share posts from the WildSafeBC Central Okanagan page to reach more people or write individual posts to address situations in specific neighbourhoods, when necessary.

In the Okanagan Westside, municipal newsletters were utilized for WildSafeBC messaging. WildSafeBC articles were included in the monthly WFN membership newsletters, sent to around 800 people. To assist with alerting residents during times of high bear activity, and providing relevant education on attractant management, three email-notification WildSafeBC articles were sent via the City of West Kelowna. The first WildSafeBC West Kelowna E-Notification was received by 3,465 accounts, and opened by 2,115 (66%); the second was received by 3,538

and opened by 1,718 (52%); the third was received by 3,374 accounts, and opened by 1,839 (59%).

The WCC submitted six news releases to the local press (Table 5). The WCC also had a video interview that was on Global News. These stories raised awareness of the challenges with human-wildlife conflict in the area, especially the high amount of bear activity that occurred this spring and fall. They were also an excellent tool to deliver information on attractant management and the importance of it, to a large number of people.

Table 5. Media stories that involved WildSafeBC in 2022

Topic	Type of Media
The Bears are back in town this Spring and so is WildSafeBC	Press Release
Increase bear sightings in Okanagan Communities this Spring	News Article
West Kelowna resident receives regular visit by black bear	News Article
The Bears are back in town this Spring and so is WildSafeBC	WFN Newsletter Article
The Bears are back in town this Spring and so is WildSafeBC	E-Notification
Fawning season	Press Release
Black bears breeding season	WFN Newsletter Article
A WildSafe Yard	WFN Newsletter Article
BC Goes Wild Event	Press Release
Importance of Reporting Wildlife	WFN Newsletter Article
WildSafeBC's Bin Tagging	Press Release
Being Bear Aware in Fall	Press Release
Being Bear Aware in Fall	TV News
Being Bear Aware in Fall	News Article
Being Bear Aware in Fall	E-Notification
Keeping your Pets Safe around Predators	WFN Newsletter Article
End of Season for WildSafeBC	Press Release
End of Season for WildSafeBC	WFN Newsletter Article
End of Season for WildSafeBC	E-Notification

Wildlife in Area Signs

The WCC worked closely with program sponsors to deploy wildlife in area signage, particularly in relation to bears. When bears were confirmed (usually through multiple sightings) to be frequenting a particular area, the WCC requested that the program sponsor place signage in the area to alert residents of a bear in the area and remind them to secure garbage (Figure 13).



Figure 13. A West Kelowna bear-in-area sign, in an area the WCC was bin tagging.

Collaborations

The WCC continued to support strata/community associations who were interested in taking steps to address and prevent human-wildlife conflicts. This season the WCC worked with a mobile home park to address the human-deer conflict and provided relevant attractant management information and safety tips. The WCC worked with a strata to provide information on specific bear activity and relevant attractant management information.

Special Initiatives

The WCC continued to identify and communicate opportunities and recommendations for Bear Smart initiatives to program sponsors. Utilizing the framework of the [Bear Smart Community criteria](#) can result in a reduction of human-bear conflicts in the community, by addressing the root causes of these conflicts. Recommendations were made to District of Peachland to consider and West Kelowna was encouraged to continue with the process of completing the Bear Hazard Assessment, implement wildlife attractant bylaws, and continue to support the Regional District work to make bear-resistant garbage carts available for residents.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges around attractant management, especially in relation to garbage, continued for Central Okanagan and Okanagan Westside communities. It is recommended that WildSafeBC education activities continue such as door-to-door canvassing, bin tagging, media interviews, as well as partnerships with program partners on wildlife in area signage and communication. Additional actions from program partners will be key to making substantial changes in the amount of human-wildlife conflicts in these communities. Residents continued to share their frustrations and concerns around human-bear conflicts in their neighbourhoods, and their desire to have bear-resistant garbage carts and municipal bylaws for attractant management.

Besides garbage, residential fruit trees were a notable attractant, and likely underreported due to the misconception that this is a natural food and does not harm bears. However, fruit trees lead to bears becoming habituated to people and reward them for spending time foraging in urban areas. When the fruit wanes, bears will turn to other nearby food sources which often leads to escalating destructive behaviour, human safety concerns, and the lethal removal of that bear. Electric fencing is one solution to manage fruit trees in a way to prevent wildlife conflicts and the WCC began gathering contacts of people who were interested in electric fencing training. An electric fencing workshop(s) would be beneficial in the region. Additionally, outreach through media and conversations with the public around electric fencing and fruit trees should continue.

A focus on human-deer conflicts should continue next season. Awareness on proper deer attractant management is imperative to handle the high numbers of urban deer around mobile home parks, and residential areas. Emphasis is needed on educating the public to not feed deer and to make deer feel unwelcome in residential areas. Efforts to ensure that suitable deer-fencing is in place to decrease the impalement and injury of deer will also help alleviate residents' concerns.

Other human-wildlife conflicts to consider is the lack of knowledge around domestic pet safety in terms of attractant management for predators such as coyotes and cougars. Further education and awareness, such as keeping pets supervised and on a leash when outdoors, how to stay safe in an encounter, carrying bear spray, keeping pets indoors especially at dawn, dusk or night, will be important points on which to focus efforts.

Other opportunities for next season include a continued focus on engaging commercial businesses through the Bare Campsite Program and the Business Pledge. The Bare Campsite Program provides clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. Private campgrounds were contacted via email. Next season, in-person visits would be beneficial. The WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to be good examples in their community on 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. E-mails were sent out to restaurant businesses in high

wildlife areas, one business was interested and would benefit from follow up in 2023. Next season focusing on outdoor stores could lead to more connections with this program.

Acknowledgements

The WCC is grateful for the generous support the WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Program receives from its funders including the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF), the Province of BC, the City of West Kelowna, the Westbank First Nation (WFN), the District of Peachland and the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO). Thank you to the staff within the sponsor organizations who assisted with program support and information sharing.

Thank you to all the Conservation Officers of the South and North Okanagan Zones for their communications and collaboration, especially CO Murdock. The WCC also thanks the BCCF team for their guidance and help throughout the season. Finally, a special thanks goes out to our dedicated program volunteers Ann Graham, Katie Pudlas, Karen Wishart, Dallas Zupp and Victoria Barsi.