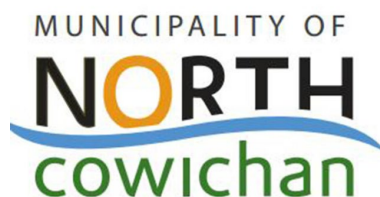


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

Cowichan Valley

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Executive Summary

In 2022, the WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley program entered its sixth year of delivery. WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley acknowledges that it operates on the unceded traditional territories of the Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Malahat First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, and Stz'uminus First Nation.

This report describes the activities of WildSafeBC in the Cowichan Valley from April 15 to November 30, 2022. As a large geographical region (Figure 1), education through door-to-door activities, presentations, and information booths were focused on hotspot areas with a higher human-bear conflict rate.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), Todd Carnahan, performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community:

- 1000+ K-7 students learned about wildlife safety in the WildSafe Rangers Program
- Delivered five public presentations to approximately 300 people
- Met with 276 households through door-to-door canvassing
- Reached 600 households through garbage tagging efforts
- Engaged 225 residents at 3 public events across the Cowichan Valley
- Delivered two bear spray training workshops
- WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley Facebook page following increased by 75 followers to 852.

WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley would not be possible without the support of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), Town of Ladysmith, Municipality of North Cowichan (MNC), Town of Lake Cowichan, the Province of British Columbia, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Looking towards 2023, the main goal should be to educate the general public across the Cowichan Valley about wildlife safety and to change perception of what human-wildlife conflict is and how to minimize conflicts. This education can be accomplished by reaching new people through the WildSafe Ranger Program, community events, online presentations, and door-to-door activities. Through education, collaboration and community solutions, we can 'keep wildlife wild and communities safe'.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley program coverage area.

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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). There were a total of 636 wildlife reports for the Cowichan Valley from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022 (Figure 2).

The Cowichan Valley is composed of many communities over a large area. With regards to wildlife activity, a regional breakdown of wildlife reports can help identify patterns and allow the WCC to target hotspots with appropriate strategies to reduce human-wildlife conflict. For clarity, the WCC categorized the region into the following areas: Central/North Cowichan, Cowichan Lake, Ladysmith, and South Cowichan (Table 1). In 2022, Lake Cowichan saw a slight increase of wildlife calls while Central/North Cowichan, Ladysmith, and the South Cowichan had lower than the average number of calls compared to the previous five years (Figure 2).

Table 1. Cowichan Valley Areas

Area	Communities in Area
Central/North Cowichan	Chemainus, Cowichan Valley, Cowichan, Crofton, Duncan, Genoa Bay, Glenora, Maple Bay, North Cowichan, Sahtlam, Saltair, Skutz Falls, Westholme
Cowichan Lake	Caycuse, Cowichan Lake, Honeymoon Bay, Lake Cowichan, Meade Creek, Mesachie Lake, Youbou
Ladysmith	Ladysmith, Oyster Bay, Thetis Island, Yellow Point
South Cowichan	Bamberton, Cobble Hill, Cowichan Bay, Cowichan Station, Malahat, Mill Bay, Shawnigan Lake

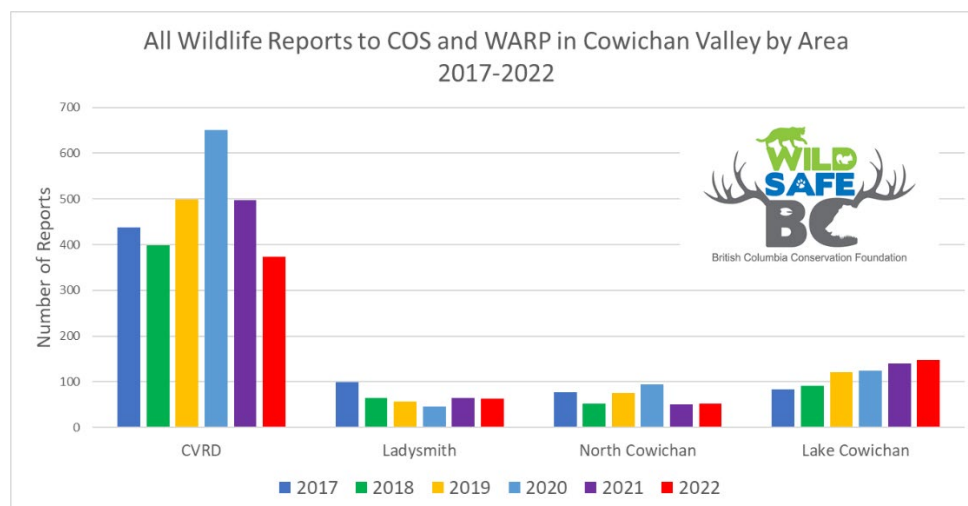


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP in the Cowichan Valley from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

The number of black bear reports (n=370) was close to the previous five-year average (n=360)(Figure 3). Bear reports jumped in May and continued to increase in June and July. This was consistent with the colder spring months delaying natural food source availability which forced animals into urban areas in search of other food sources. The reports drastically decreased in August. Into the fall, reports remained lower, potentially because those usual natural food sources were again abundant with the warmer weather (Figure 4).

Deer reports were much lower this year compared to the past several years (Figure 3). Elk reports were slightly higher than the five-year average, while cougar and other wildlife reports remained consistent with previous years. Other wildlife calls included raptors, wolves, and non-specified animals.

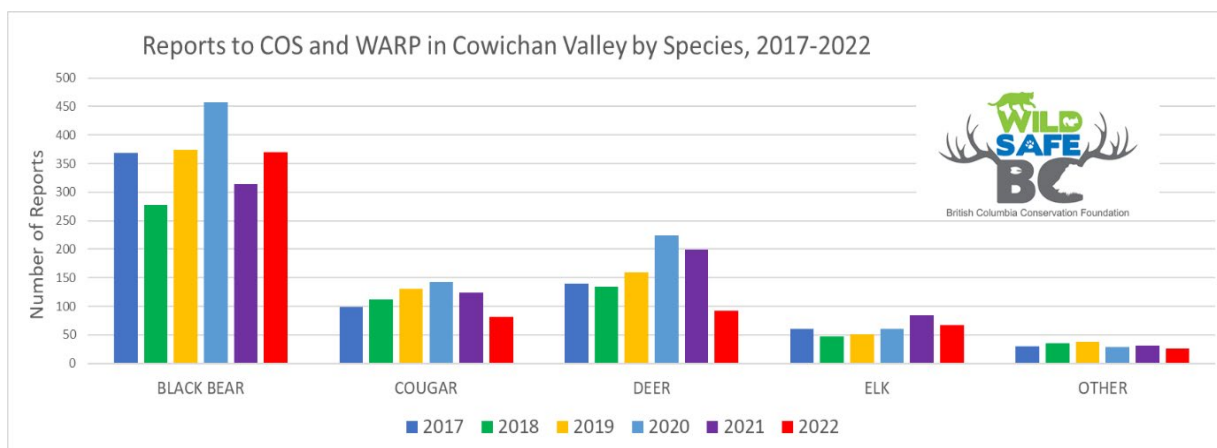


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP by species from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

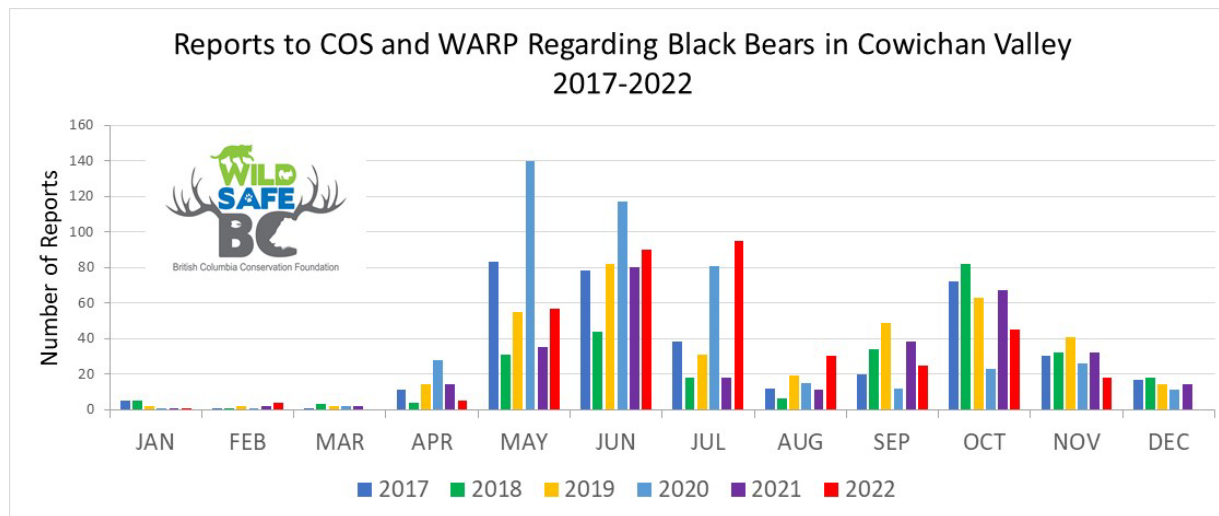


Figure 4. Black Bear reports to the COS and WARP monthly from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program introduces students to the concept of human-wildlife conflict and encourages them to take an active role in helping their families with identifying and securing attractants at home (Figure 5). WildSafeBC offers indoor, outdoor and online presentations to students. There were 11 schools and a Brownie Group that participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program through indoor and outdoor presentations. There were 1,167 students that became WildSafe Rangers (Table 2) and received kits that included a WildSafe Ranger activity book, sticker, and tattoo.

Table 2. Schools and groups that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2022.

School/Group	Grade	No. of Classes	Students
Ecole Cobble Hill Elementary	3,4,5,6	12	300
Lake Cowichan Primary	K/1	4	90
Maple Bay Elementary	4,5,6,7	10	250
Queen Margaret School	4,5,6	3	60
Mill Bay Nature School	2,3,4	2	50
Swallowtail Elementary	K,1,2,3,4	4	50
Lake Cowichan Elementary	5,6		
Mill Bay Sparks & Brownies	2,3,4	1	28
Evergreen Nature School	4,5,6,7	2	50
St Johns Academy	5,6,7,8,9	1	150
Youbou Homeschool	5,6,7	1	14
Discovery Elementary	4,5,6	5	125
Total		45	1167



Figure 5. Wildlife Awareness & Safety presentation at St. John's Academy, June 2022.

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave three in-person presentations and one online presentation in 2022 (Table 3). These presentations were focused on local Wildlife Awareness and Safety combined with Bear Spray use and safety (Figure 6). In addition, one presentation was given that summarized the WildSafeBC Cowichan Program deliverables.

Table 3. WildSafeBC Presentations in the Cowichan Valley in 2022.

Group	Presentation	Date	Participants
Homesteading Fair	Wildlife Awareness & Safety	Sept 17, 2022	25
Cowichan Lake Recreation	Wildlife Safety	Oct 15, 2022	16
University of Victoria Bio Lab	Bear Spray Training	June 14, 2022	8
BC Rivers Day at Stoltz Pools	Wildlife Safety	Sept 25, 2022	12
Cowichan Watershed Board	2022 Program Overview online	Oct 31st, 2022	15



Figure 6. Bear Spray Training for UVic field lab members, June 14 2022.

Display Booths

WildSafeBC hosted information tables at the Quw'utsun Rivers Day, the Youbou Regatta, the Homesteading Fair in Cowichan Station, and Honeymoon Bay Days (Table 4). Residents around Cowichan Lake were often concerned about late season cougars and elk in the Youbou area. Honeymoon Bay conversations revolved around bears accessing garbage.

The wildlife safety display on Quw'utsun Rivers Day highlighted Bare Camping (Figures 7 and 8) as part of WildSafeBC BC Goes Wild Campaign. BC Goes Wild celebrates wildlife in BC in September, which is typically the month when human-bear conflicts are at their highest. A farming focus at the Homesteading Fair resulted in many conversations about electric fencing and managing livestock attractants.

Table 4. WildSafeBC information booths in the Cowichan Valley in 2022.

School	Date	Visits
Quw'utsun Rivers Day	September 25, 2022	150
Homesteading Fair at the Hub	September 17, 2022	138
Honeymoon Bay Day	July 16, 2022	174
Youbou Regatta	August 13, 2022	125



Figure 7. The WCC presents a WildSafeBC hat to veteran Cowichan River Steward, David Polster at Quw'utsun Rivers Day, September 25, 2022 (Photo courtesy of *The Discourse*).



Figure 8. WildSafeBC provided public engagement services at several events throughout the CVRD.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door canvassing in high risk neighbourhoods where bears are already habituated is an excellent method of changing resident's behaviours in terms of attractant management.

When residents were away from home the WCC dropped an information package including brochures (black bears, cougar, deer) and a letter identifying attractants and management techniques. These packages provide residents with reasons and the tools to make changes so they can help reduce the risk of human-wildlife conflicts in their neighbourhood.

Through door-to-door canvassing the WCC met with over 100 residents at home and delivered over 276 information packages (Table 5). The following areas were targeted for education due to significant numbers of reports of black bear activity.

Table 5. Door-to-door education in the Cowichan Valley in 2022.

Community	In-Person Conversations	Door Hangers Left	Total Households Visited
Ladysmith Malone Rd	38	65	65
Lake Cowichan Marble Bay, Woodland Shores	21	50	50
Maple Bay, The Properties	15	56	56
South Shawnigan Lake	20	54	54
Cobble Hill, Thain, Galliers Rds	6	45	51

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection (Figure 9). During eight outings, a total of 608 bins were tagged throughout the CVRD (Table 6).



Figure 9. Bins placed at the curb the night before collection received a tag, Cowichan Valley, 2022.

Table 6. Areas that received garbage tagging in the Cowichan Valley Regional District in 2022.

Municipal Collection Area	Bins Tagged (first night)	Bins Tagged (second night)	Households with bins out on both nights
Glenora	92	51	2
Youbou, Meade Creek	33	n/a	n/a
Cherry Pt	74	n/a	n/a
Sahtlam	88	55	3
Malone Rd, Ladysmith	95	n/a	n/a
Shawnigan Estates, Thain	120	n/a	n/a

The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing human behaviours is demonstrated by the significant amount of bins tagged during the initial survey that were not found on the curb again during the second survey (Figure 10). Reducing the number of bins placed curbside overnight prior to collection will help with the efforts to reduce human-wildlife conflicts.

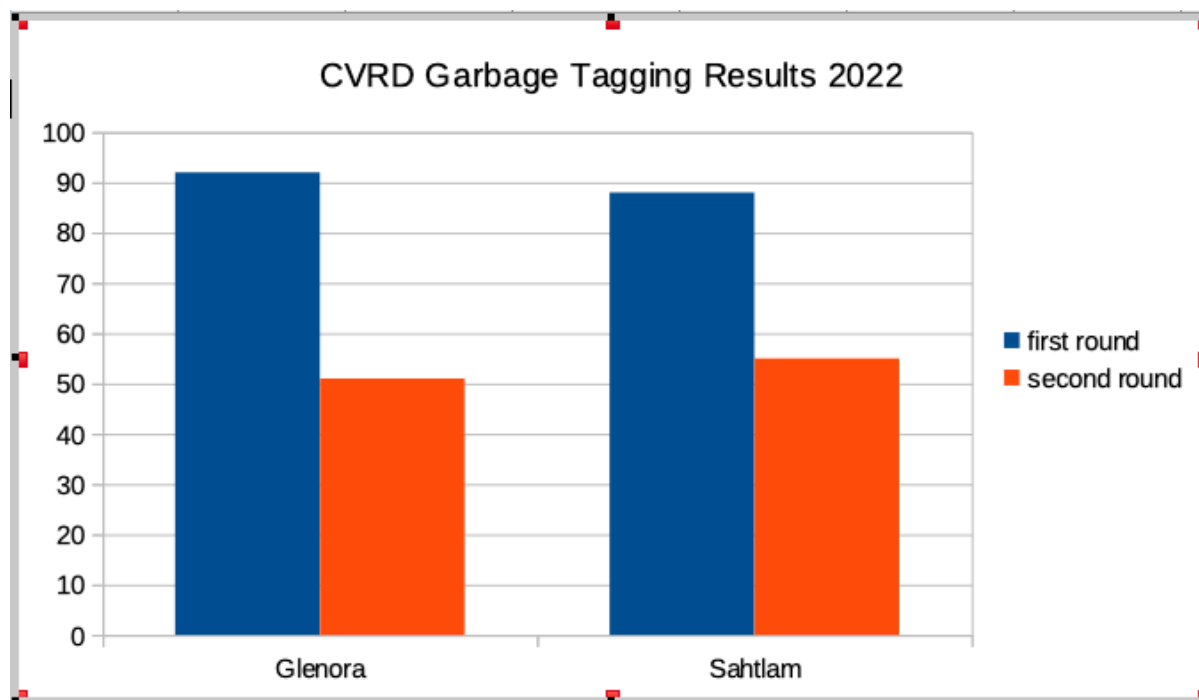


Figure 10. Number of bins placed out early for collection before and after education activities in the Cowichan Valley, 2022.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley Facebook page grew in 2022 from 777 to 852 followers. Posts about deer fawns in the early summer and cougars anytime during the season generated the most interest (comments, likes, shares) online. Followers also appreciated posts with charts on types of attractants and bear activity.

The WildSafeBC booth was featured on the front page of the Cowichan Valley Citizen on August 25th, 2022 generating significant interest in the WildSafeBC Rangers Program in the fall. Several educators reached out to the WCC to book WRP sessions for their students.

Challenges and Opportunities

The WildSafeBC Cowichan Program continues to adapt to COVID-19 measures and has been able to transition back to relatively normal activities in public. Where possible, activities were held outside and in small organized groups.

Waste continues to be the largest source of attractant in the Cowichan Valley. The region covered by the WCC has five waste removal systems and each with separate schedules of removal. New areas with emerging bear issues were covered when canvassing in 2022 by leaving information packages and also engaging residents in their yards.

Another challenge to waste collection is early placement of bins. Areas serviced by the CVRD are under the regional bylaw to store waste in a wild-safe manner and to place on the curb after 5am on collection morning; no other service areas in the region have a bylaw restricting the earliest time for curbside placement. Garbage tagging has been an excellent way to educate residents about early curbside placement, however municipal bylaws with enforcement would also go a long way to address this issue. To address the issue of waste storage and removal in the community, the following WildSafeBC initiatives should continue in 2023:

- Develop shared strategies and outcomes through the regional Bear Working Group
- Deliver more workshops on bear spray, electric fencing, and tracking wildlife
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards of not managing attractants and solutions for residents through WildSafe Ranger programming, social media, news articles, and presentations
- Increase presence at community events and information tables in popular spots around the valley
- Increase door-to-door canvassing and garbage tagging campaigns in hotspots.
- Continue to promote Bare Camping and Business Pledges to build the community awareness around WildSafeBC messaging

Addressing attractants like livestock, fruit trees and gardens, and compost is complicated because the region is largely rural and there are residents who are acting on the misconception that leaving fruit on the trees or dumping the fruit as a source of food for wildlife helps wildlife to survive. It is important to continue to educate the public to address these misconceptions. Holding electric fence and bear spray workshops would provide residents with a solution that could help with changing this narrative.

Due to temporary issues during a transition to new software the WARP Program has been only partially functional as a public interface. While users can view reports on the map, the nature of the attractant is not visible. In addition to not having a full picture of the data from reports made many wildlife conflicts are underreported in the Cowichan Valley. After monitoring social media,

the WCC determined many people post about wildlife conflicts that do not have a corresponding entry in WARP. Continued education about when and why to phone the COS, renewed door-to-door canvassing and expanding social media presence will help to change beliefs about reporting wildlife conflicts.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, the WCC would like to thank the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Municipality of North Cowichan, the Town of Ladysmith, the Town of Lake Cowichan, the Province of BC, Island Return-It, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for sponsoring WildSafeBC in the Cowichan Valley.

The WCC also appreciates the assistance of Sgt. Scott Norris, Sgt. Stuart Bates, Officer Mark Kissinger, and Officer Robin Sano from the BC Conservation Officer Service, Ilse Saraday, from the CVRD, Shawn Chadburn from the MNC. Lastly, thank you to all the residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties and learn more about our local wildlife. Let's continue to keep wildlife wild and our communities safe!