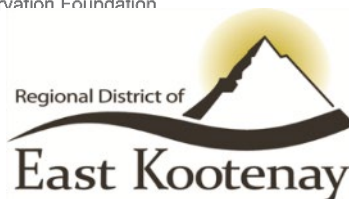


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

Elk Valley and South Country

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Elk Valley and South Country (EVSC) program between May 1st, and November 30th, 2022. The Elk Valley, and surrounding Regional District of Elk Valley (RDEK) Area A, and South Country and surrounding RDEK Area B, are located within Ktunaxa traditional territory (Figure 1). The area is a combination of mining towns, rural areas, farming and ranching, summer cottages, and campgrounds, with a variety of attractants and human-wildlife conflict. Black bear, deer and elk, were the most reported species to the Conservation Officer Service (COS). It was a record year for black bear reports with 119 between January 1st, 2022 to November 26th, 2022.

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

- There were 9 WildSafe Ranger Presentations reaching 162 students.
- There were 5 Wildlife Safety Presentations with 104 participants.
- 235 people were reached via display booths at Farmers' Markets in Sparwood and Bayne's Lake.
- 58 carts were placed curbside the day before collection, given a warning sticker, and addresses sent to Sparwood bylaw for educational follow up.
- 39 posts reached more than 1,200 Facebook page followers, and thousands more through shared content to other pages.
- 30 contacts were made through door-to-door education in Elkford, with an additional 50 contacts made at South Country campsites after human-bear conflict reports were made due to improper storage of attractants at long-term campsites.

The storage of garbage outdoors, unmanaged fruit trees, and record numbers of trail and back country use, all contributed to human-wildlife conflict in Elk Valley and South Country communities.

The WCC would like thank the Regional District of the East Kootenay, the District of Sparwood, the BC Conservation Foundation, the Columbia Basin Trust, and the Government of British Columbia, for their ongoing support for this project that is so crucial to human-wildlife coexistence. Collaboration with community groups and support from local media has enabled WildSafeBC to reach a broad range of residents and visitors. Moving forward, WildSafeBC is looking forward to working with residents, visitors, and collaborating with community groups, to help keep wildlife wild and communities safe.

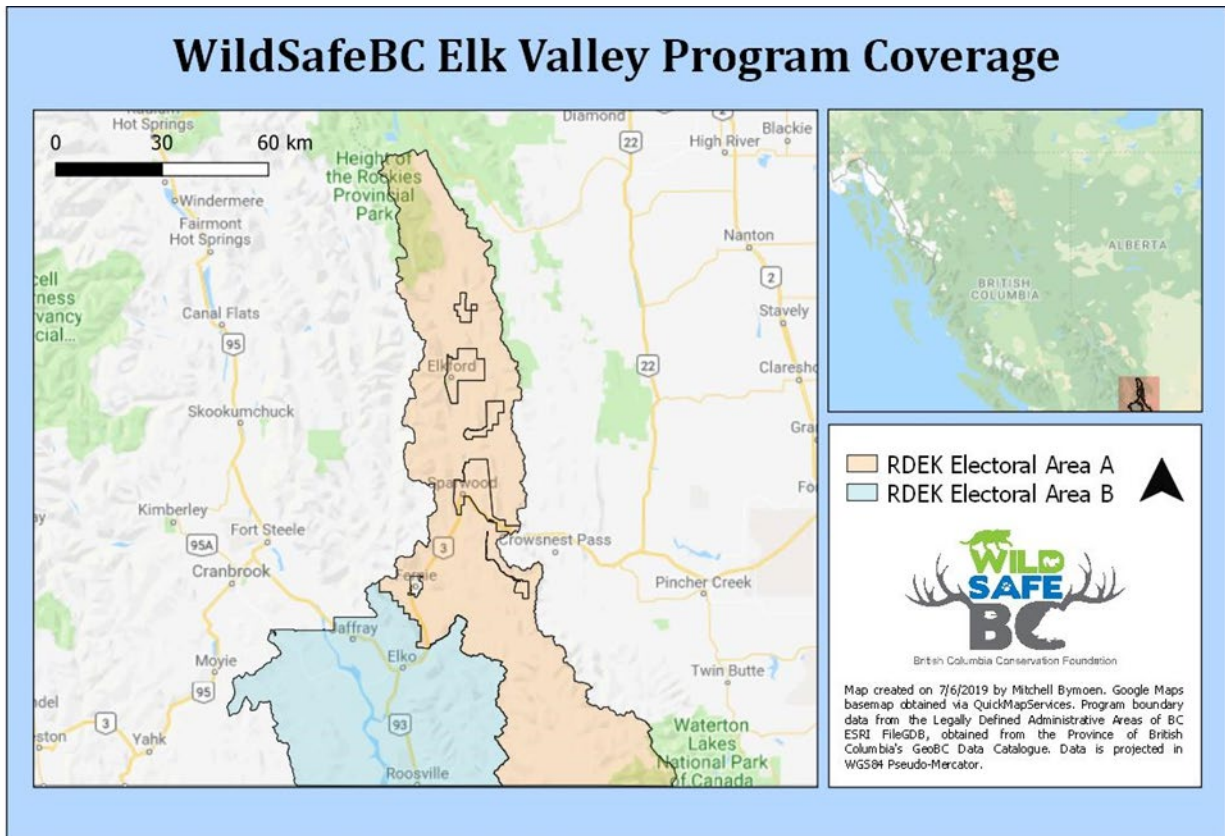


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Elk Valley and South Country program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: Booth set up at Bayne's Lake Farmer's Market

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 the EVSC includes data from January 1st, 2017 to November 26th, 2022.

This year there were record 119 reports regarding black bears, followed by 78 deer and 35 elk reports (Figure 2). There were only 18 reports made about grizzly bears. Other species that were reported were 2 bighorn sheep, 5 cougar, 3 moose, 1 bobcat, 1 wolf, 2 coyote, 1 fox, and 1 raptor.

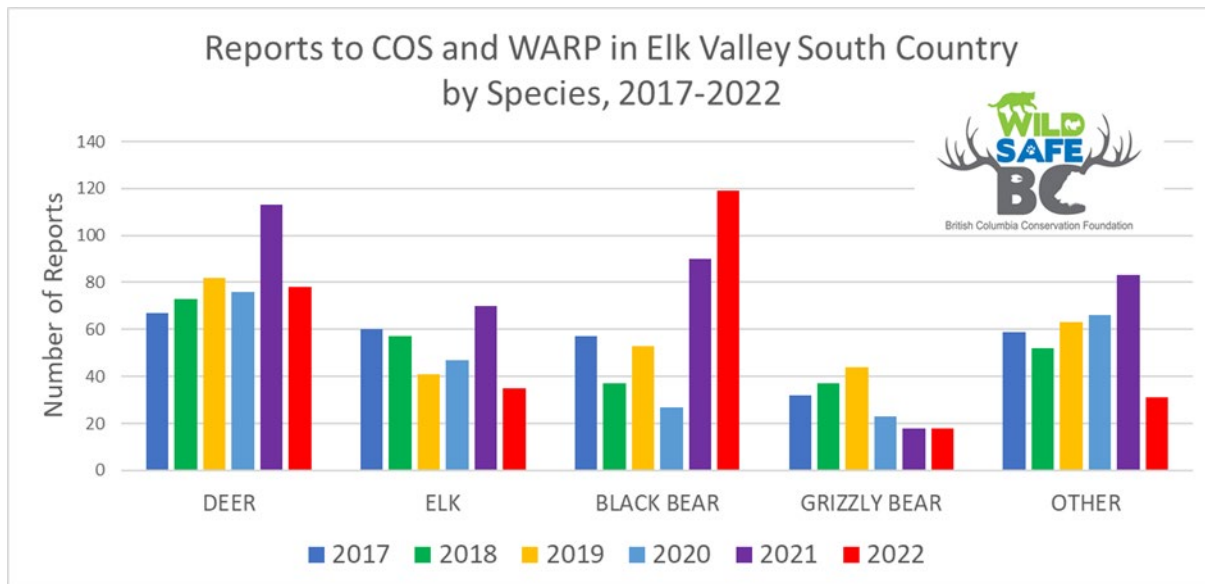


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP by species from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

Black bear reports were significantly higher than the average of 53 reports per year in the previous 5 years. It is possible that many of these reports came from the same few black bears that were frequently spotted in Elkford. This trend is opposite to Fernie, where black bear reports were significantly lower than last year. It is also possible that a cold spring brought bears into the valley bottoms in search of food, and some of those bears stayed after being able to easily access garbage.

Elkford is in the process of transitioning over to bear-resistant residential garbage bins, but there are still many non-bear-resistant bins in town. This was compounded by many broken commercial and large-scale residential bins that made easy food sources for young bears. Black bears were also reported accessing garbage around Rosen Lake, South Country campgrounds, and Sparwood. Fruit trees also continued to attract bears into this area. The majority of black bear reports occurred during the late summer and fall months (Figure 3). At this time of year, bears are beginning to enter hyperphagia and are looking to eat about 20,000 calories per day.

This makes easy food sources, such as outdoor garbage and unmanaged fruit trees, especially attractive at this time of year. Many fruit trees and berry bushes, such as apples, plums, and mountain ash, ripen during the fall, and provide high calorie rewards with little effort.

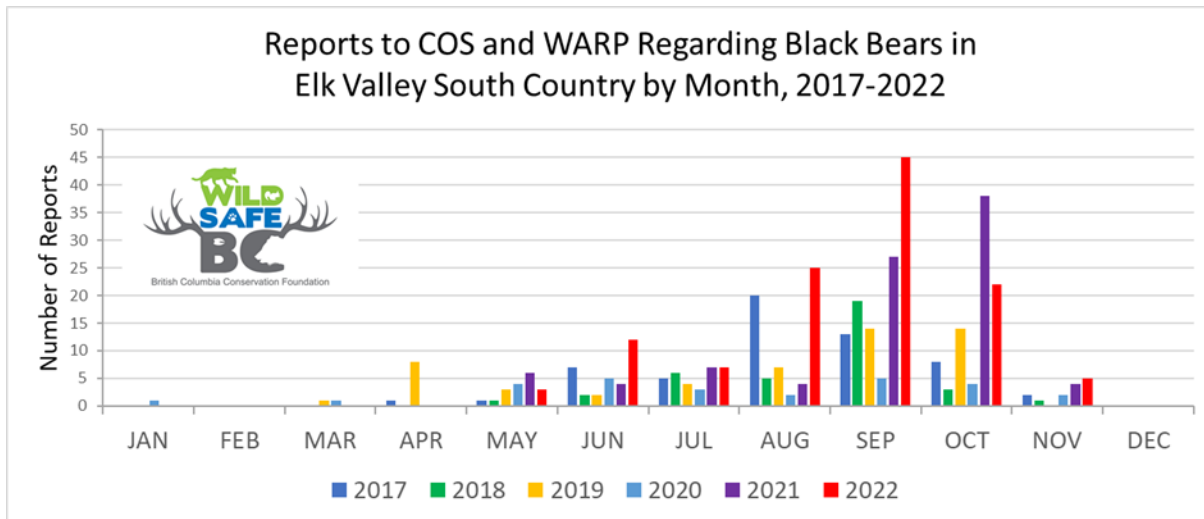


Figure 3. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP by month, January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

Grizzly bear reports, on the other hand, were at a five-year low, with only 18 reports. These reports varied from grizzly bears on carcasses visible from the highway, to a dog walker being charged in Hosmer (Figure 4). Reports to the COS can fluctuate year to year for many reasons, such as the public's tendency to report or natural bear population fluctuations.

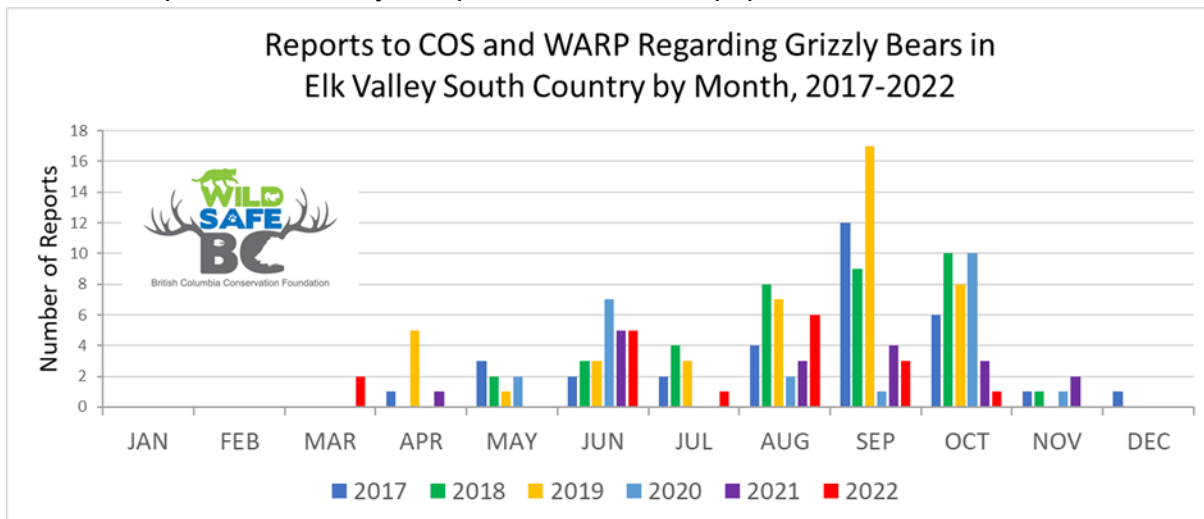


Figure 4. Grizzly bear reports to the COS and WARP by month, January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. There were 4 schools with 9 separate classes that participated in the program this year (Table 1, Figure 5). The preschool and elementary aged kids were given WRP kits to take home. Older students had a wildlife safety presentation typically provided to adult audiences.

Table 1. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2022.

School or Group	Grade	Students
Sparwood Secondary	8, 10	55
Elkford Secondary	10,11,12	50
Jaffrey Secondary	7,8	30
Outdoor Connections	preschool	27



Figure 5. The WCC delivering the WRP to a preschool group. Photo courtesy of Corrine Hoetmer

Presentations to Community Groups

WildSafeBC presentations to community groups include information on wildlife biology, how to prevent and respond to wildlife encounters, and the safe use of bear spray. This information was delivered to 165 participants in 8 separate sessions with different community groups (Table 2).

Table 2. Groups and organizations that attended WildSafeBC Wildlife Safety and Bear Spray presentations.

Organization	Attendees
BC Assessment Board	12
Fernie Alpine Resort Orientation	50
Mt Fernie Provincial Park Staff	2
Electric Fencing Workshop, Fernie	9
Electric Fencing Workshop, Sparwood	5
Bear Safety Event, Jaffrey	11
NUPQU Development	50
Bear Safety Event, Elkford	26

Display Booths

The WildSafeBC display booth was set up twice at the Sparwood Farmers' Market and twice at the Bayne's Lake Farmers' market, where the WCC had the opportunity to interact with an estimated 235 people (Figure 6). One of the Bayne's Lake booths was a collaborative effort with Ambassador Wild, which combined responsible recreation education with wildlife safety. These booths were popular with locals wanting to know more about recent bear activity and with tourists who were keen to learn more about how to stay safe in bear country. The WildSafeBC "Bear Safety When Recreating" free online course, as well as the "Staying Safe in Bear Country" video were recommended to people that did not have time for an in-depth conversation on the spot. People were also eager to learn about other large fauna, such as cougars and moose. Kids were excited to see the bear hides and animal skulls, as well as to pick out temporary tattoos to take home. The WCC made sure to include information on the responsible management of wildlife attractants.



Figure 6. The WCC at a Display Booth in Sparwood, 2022.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education resulted in 80 contacts with people who reside in areas with increased wildlife activity, 30 in a residential neighbourhood in Elkford, and another 50 in long-term campgrounds in the South Country. Elkford canvassing focused on residents who were keeping their garbage outdoors despite not having a bear-resistant tote. For residents who did have the new totes, suggestions were made on how to keep them secured. There is a further opportunity in Elkford to provide education to residents who live in multi-family dwellings. Bears accessed these large bins numerous times. Issues included broken latches and bent lids, which should be reported to the District. Improper use of bins could be improved with an educational campaign and possibly information stickers on the bins. Bear-resistant enclosures for these bins would also be beneficial. The South Country canvassing focused on attractants, such as fridges and coolers that were being kept on decks outdoors at long-term campgrounds.

Bin tagging is an educational activity where the WCC places a removable warning sticker on garbage or compost bins that placed on the curb the night before collection. Bin tagging was conducted primarily in Sparwood. These bear-resistant carts lose all their security once placed out for collection unlocked, therefore it is important to set them out as close to collection time as possible. The north end of downtown, as well as Spardell trailer park, were surveyed 3 times, with 58 warning stickers handed out. Addresses were sent to Sparwood bylaw to provide follow up education. Despite the bear-resistant nature of the Sparwood bins, some that were secured with the clips were still accessed by bears. There is an opportunity in Sparwood to provide education to residents about the importance of securing these bins to a solid object.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Elk Valley Facebook page grew almost 10% in 2022 from 1,104 to 1,213 page followers because of 39 posts made to the page over the season. The WCC submitted several articles and provided interviews with the *Free Press*. Rewind Radio, B104, and TodayFM radio station also contacted the coordinator for wildlife updates and educational messages. A broad range of people, throughout a large geographic area, were reached through the four news articles published in the *Free Press* and the three radio interviews.

Wildlife in Area Signs

The WildSafeBC wildlife in area signs were installed throughout the season for various reasons. In areas such as Rosen Lake and Elkford, signs were used to alert people that bears were getting into garbage and as a reminder to put away all attractants. Some signs were installed after an animal was seen displaying behaviour that could be interpreted as dangerous. This includes the incident where a grizzly bear charged a dog walker in Hosmer and reports of aggressive deer in Sparwood. Some were installed because animals were spotted in a particularly sensitive location, such as black bear activity near an elementary school. If an animal was encountered in a safe and natural way, no signs were used, as animal encounters should be expected at any time in this area. There was a collaborative effort between the District of Sparwood, the District of Elkford, the COS, bylaw, and the WCC to decide when and

where to put up signs, and to make public notifications on various social media platforms. Elkford and Sparwood bylaw officers, as well as Tracey Halliday from RecSafe and Mark Elson from Rosen Lake area, were instrumental in getting these signs up in a timely fashion and moving or removing them as necessary, since the WCC was not always close to these areas. Some of the signs were stored with Elkford and Sparwood bylaw officers for future use. The signs were a great opportunity to engage the neighborhood, start discussions and create awareness for people passing by, long-time residents, new seasonal residents and visitors.

Collaborations

The WildSafeBC Elk Valley South Country Program has been very well supported, received, and in demand from organizations and residents throughout the RDEK. Over the years, the program has formed many valuable partnerships and has collaborated with many community organizations. Tracey Halliday, who now is an ambassador for RecSafe, was a huge help in organizing the two workshops that were held in Elkford, as well as contributing to social messaging and sharing information. She will be a huge asset in the future for that area of the RDEK. Ambassador Wild, which operates out of Fernie but throughout the RDEK, worked on consistent messaging and incorporating wildlife safety messaging into their events. The fruit tree removal/replacement project was a collaborative effort between Dr. Clayton Lamb, Biodiversity Pathways, WildSafeBC, and the District of Sparwood. Events and educational efforts were supported by wildlife biologist Dr. Clayton Lamb, and Gillian Sanders from Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions, who worked together to organize six workshops in the area featuring safety, fruit tree management, electric fencing, and grizzly bear coexistence. Cost-share programs for fruit tree removal and electric fencing were encouraged at these workshops in hopes of working towards a future that includes food sustainability and wildlife coexistence.

Communication between the COS, bylaw officers and WildSafeBC enabled more responses to human-wildlife conflict in a larger area. The distribution of newsletters to residents at Fernie Alpine Resort, Tie Lake and Rosen Lake, was facilitated by the respective homeowners' associations and enabled WildSafeBC messaging to reach hundreds of residents via email.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC was invited back for a second year to provide wildlife awareness and safety training for approximately 50 Nupqu staff (Nupqu is the Ktunaxa word for bear). Nupqu is owned by the Ktunaxa National Council and conducts environmental work throughout the Regional District of the East Kootenay.

Special Initiatives

This year the WCC also continued work with Wildlife Biologist Dr. Clayton Lamb on the Fruit Tree Removal/Replacement Project, which was started in 2021. The program provides subsidies for people to remove fruit trees that are not well managed and will lead to conflicts between humans and wildlife. While the focus of this project is to reduce grizzly bear attractants, these trees also draw black bears, deer, and other wildlife into neighborhoods, and therefore

removing these trees has the potential to reduce human-wildlife conflicts. There were 13 trees on 8 different properties in the Elk Valley removed (Figure 7). The property owners in Sparwood were also referred to Sparwood's Tree Replacement Program. Activities included an interview with the *Free Press*, talking with property owners and promotion of the program on social media. This program generated considerable interest and those who chose to wait until next year should be followed up with in the next season. The COS really appreciated the opportunity to refer landowners with problem trees to the WCC who had the ability to provide solutions and support to help resolve this aspect of human-wildlife conflict. WildSafeBC would like to thank Dr Clayton Lamb and Biodiversity Pathways for collaborating with us on this project. We are grateful for the funding provided by the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative and Province of BC Together for Wildlife Strategy.



Figure 7. Crabapple tree attracting wildlife (left) which the landowner has removed (right).

Challenges and Opportunities

The program coverage area is large with a combination of mining towns, rural areas, farming and ranching, summer cottages and campgrounds with a variety of attractants present that can lead to human-wildlife conflict. All these groups have different levels of understanding and tolerance for wildlife, especially grizzly bears, and require innovative educational efforts and collaboration with other community groups and agencies to help educate this diverse group of people on how to better coexist with wildlife.

As the area continues to grow and develop, waste management strategies evolve, and wildlife safe practices continue to improve, there is a continuing need for education to reach people in the area. With wildlife encounters common in both the backcountry and within town limits, coexistence strategies are critical to making our communities safe for humans and animals.

To continue reducing human-wildlife conflicts in the region, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2023:

- Continue garbage tagging and door-to-door canvassing to educate residents about the dangers of placing garbage out before collection day. Work on solutions for shift workers that are not home at the time of collection.
- Continue to collaborate with the District of Elkford to work towards having bear-resistant containers throughout the community.
- Assess the effectiveness of the commercial size garbage containers in Elkford, and work towards solutions for keeping wildlife out. Examples include educational stickers on the bins, full-contained garbage enclosures, and information on who to contact about repairs.
- Educate residents with bear-resistant totes that they should still be stored responsibly, either in an enclosed area or secured upright to a solid object.
- Continue existing education campaigns and reach a broader range of people through collaboration with community organizations such as RecSafe's Tracey Halliday, Sparwood Trails Alliance, Sparwood Youth Groups, Tie Lake, Rosen Lake and F.A.R. Homeowners Associations, Baynes Lake Lions Club, and others.
- Continue progress made with the Fruit Tree Removal/Replacement.
- Keep promoting electric fencing and referring property owners with livestock, chickens and bees to Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions.
- Promote the importance of preventing encounters in recreation areas and encourage the safe use of bear spray with local bike shops and at local trailheads.
- Engage and recognize more businesses through the WildSafeBC Business Pledge.
- Revisit progress from 2021 with the Bare Campsite Program Pilot Project at Mt Fernie Provincial Park, and approach other campgrounds such as East Kootenay Parks and other independent campgrounds. Big Pine Resort by Lake Kootenay may be eager to join after black bear troubles in 2022.
- Deliver posters, brochures and other educational materials to central locations such as gas stations, campgrounds and other public places.
- Continue building relationships with Nupqu which is owned and operated by the Ktunaxa National Council.

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC is grateful for the generous support the program receives from sponsors, partners, and volunteers. Thanks to our sponsors: the Province of BC, Columbia Basin Trust, British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF), District of Sparwood, and the RDEK Areas A and B. Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: Conservation Officers Patricia Burley and Ryan Gordon, Bylaw Officers Frank DeBoon and Bruce Hunter, Wildlife Biologist Clayton Lamb, Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Solutions, Tracey Halliday, RecSafe, *The Free Press*, Rewind Radio, B104, TodayFM, Sparwood Mountain Bike Club. Finally, thank you to everyone for working to be a good neighbor this season by removing

wildlife attractants from properties and preventing human-wildlife conflict when out in recreational areas. Let's continue to work to keep wildlife wild and our community safe!