

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

Nelson & RDCK Area E and F

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Nelson Program between May 15 and November 30, 2022. The program covers the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) Electoral Areas E and F including the City of Nelson and the smaller unincorporated communities from Ainsworth to Bonnington (Figure 1). The program is located within the traditional territories of the Sinixt, Ktunaxa Nation, Sylix, and Métis Peoples.

This season was notable for the highest number of black bear reports since 2016 with 461 reports. This is likely a result of lower than usual natural food availability after a long, cold, wet spring, followed by a short and dry summer along with a delayed heavy snow pack melt and the residual effects of the 2021 wildfires. All of these factors led to more bears seeking foods in urban communities. Despite the absence of specific attractant data input in WARP, due to software upgrades earlier in the season, human generated garbage was the most reported attractant to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and the City of Nelson Public Works and Bylaw departments. This year also saw a high number of bears (12) destroyed due to human habituation and food conditioning after accessing unsecured garbage within the City of Nelson.

The 2022 WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing human-wildlife conflict in the community. WildSafeBC provided the following:

- 35 WildSafe Ranger presentations to 861 youth
- 7 wildlife awareness and safety presentations delivered to 102 people
- 254 people reached at display booths at Kokanee Creek Provincial Park, Harvest Festival, and local trailheads
- 842 door hangers distributed in high conflict areas
- Bin tagging the night before collection in high conflict areas
- WildSafeBC messaging was shared through 50 social media posts, 5 articles in *The Nelson Star* and *The Narwhal*, along with 2 radio appearances for Bounce Radio.
- Acorn + Oak became the first business in Nelson to take the WildSafeBC Business Pledge.

Thanks to generous funding from the Province of British Columbia, the Columbia Basin Trust, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the BC Conservation Foundation, and the City of Nelson, the WildSafeBC Nelson Program accomplished many education outreach goals in 2022. Moving forward, the WildSafeBC Nelson Program will need to continue to deliver education, provide solutions, and facilitate collaborations to address unsecured wildlife attractants and continue efforts to “keep wildlife wild and communities safe”.

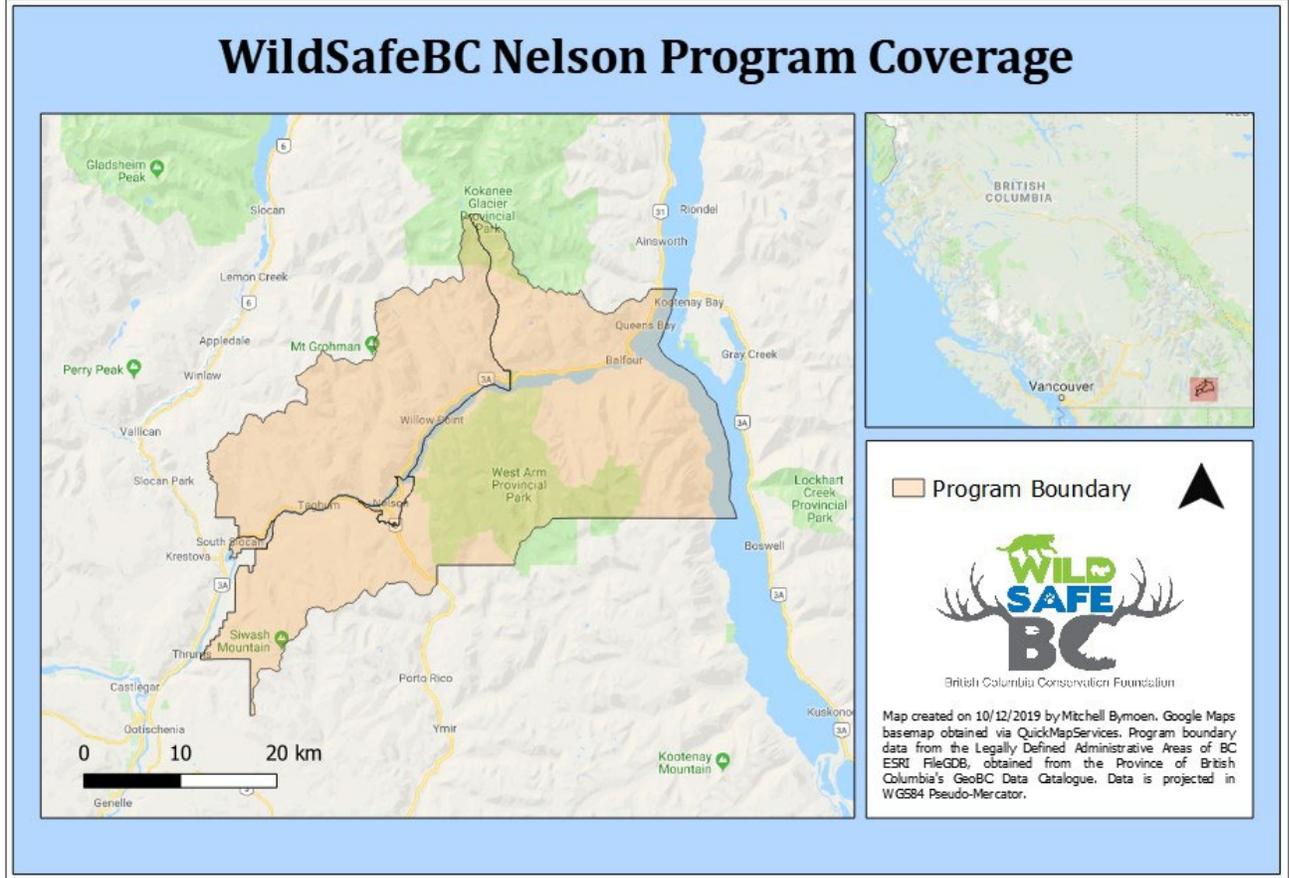


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Nelson Program coverage area including RDCK Electoral Areas E and F.

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Cover Photo: Grizzly bear near a local creek, by D. White

Highlights from 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) on the WildSafeBC website. This data is updated daily and this report for Nelson includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 26, 2022.

Early in the season, WARP underwent a software upgrade, which subsequently affected the ability to include specific data such as attractants, encounter type and outcome. Therefore, 2022 data is limited to species reported only. Without the attractant data usually available from WARP, main attractant determinations were made anecdotally this year. Through canvassing neighbourhoods and door-to-door campaigns, the WCC found that unsecured garbage, bird feeders and backyard fruit/nut trees were the main attractants reported for black bears around Nelson in the 2022 season.

From January 1 to November 26, 2022, there were 461 black bear reports and 5 grizzly bear reports. This was the busiest year for black bear reports since 2016. There were 5 cougar and 40 deer reports that were both average (Figure 2). Black bear reports indicated the highest conflict months were June, August, and September with 88, 99 and 76 reports respectively (Figure 3).

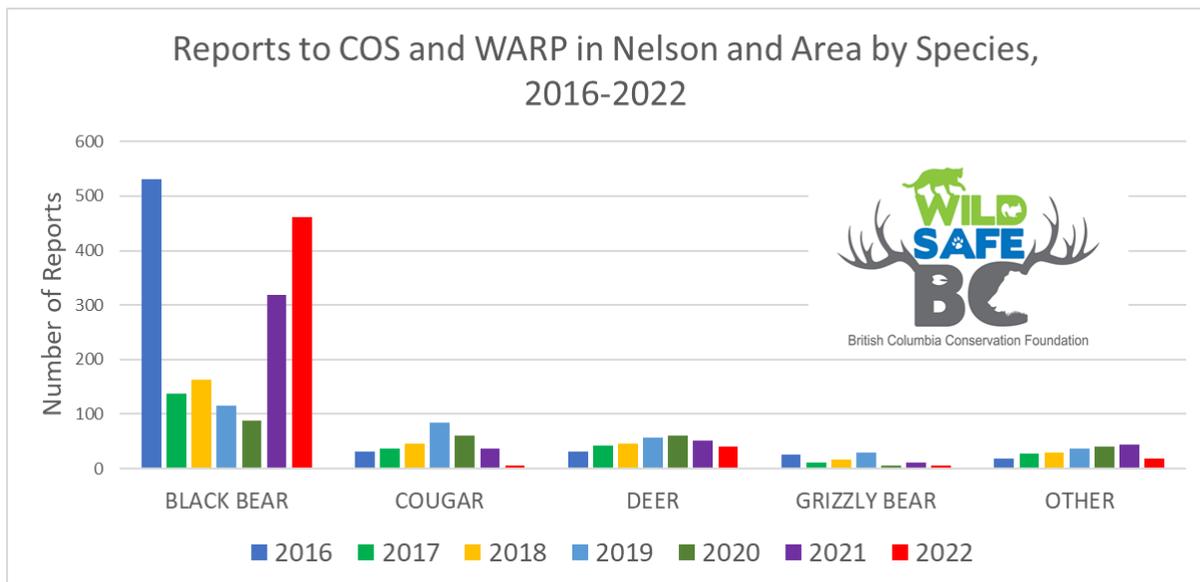


Figure 2. Reports to COS and WARP in Nelson and Area by species, January 1, 2016 to November 26, 2022.

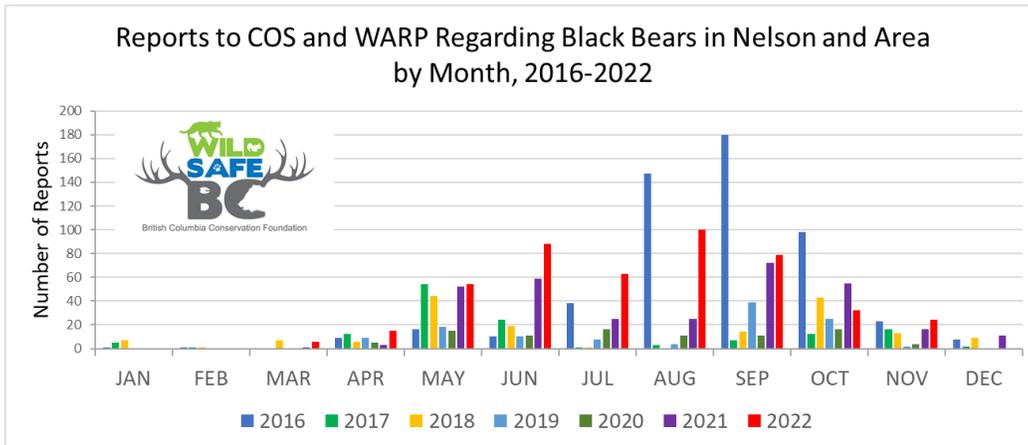


Figure 3. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP by month, January 1, 2016 to November 26, 2022.

WildSafe Ranger Program



The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict and engages youth and their families to take on a more active role in staying safe and reducing access to attractants (Figure 4).

A total of 861 students from 7 schools, pre-school to Grade 9, became WildSafe Rangers (Table 1). Over the season, the WCC hosted WRP presentations at schools and during class field trips to Cottonwood Lake and Gyro Park (Figure 5). Students learned about local wildlife biology, wildlife safety, and attractant management during presentations that included storytelling, roll play and with hands-on interactions with animal pelts and skulls.

Figure 4. Children engaged with wildlife through storytelling and hands on experiences in WRP programs.

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

Date	School	Grade	No. Participants
June	SilverKing ChildCare	Preschool	8
October	South Nelson Elementary	K-5	196
November	Hume Elementary	K-5	187
November	Rosemont Elementary	K-5	122
November	Brent Kennedy	K-6	187
November	Homelinks ELEV8 Online	K-8	18
November	Trafalgar Middle School	8-9	15
November	Cornerstone Daycare	Preschool	18



Figure 5. The WCC taught children about attractant management and wildlife safety at 7 schools.

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC provided 8 presentations to 137 participants (Table 2, Figure 6). Presentations focused on attractant mitigation, wildlife safety and bear spray usage. Presentations at Selkirk College campus proved quite valuable, as the majority of students in attendance were new to the area, or from abroad. Therefore, were uneducated on wildlife safety and responsibilities to attractant management.



Figure 6. Selkirk College Safety Presentation.

Table 2. Presentations to community groups in 2022.

Date	Organization	Topic	Number of Participants
June 15	Selkirk College	Wildlife safety & attractant mitigation	13
June 29	Selkirk College	Wildlife safety & attractants & bear spray workshop	19
July 14	Schoolhouse for Early Learning - staff	Wildlife safety	16
August 26	Nelson Waldorf School - staff	Wildlife safety and bear spray demonstration	15
Sept 20	North Point Brewery	Attractant mitigation & trivia night	24
Sept 23	Nelson Rotary Club members	Attractant mitigation	23
Nov 4	Selkirk College	Wildlife safety & attractant mitigation	27

Display Booths

Display booths were set up at Kokanee Creek Provincial Park Nature Centre and Taghum Harvest Festival this year (Table 3, Figure 7). Display booths at these events were an effective way to reach community members and have conversations surrounding attractants for wildlife in and around the home.

A booth focused on families and kids camping at Kokanee Creek Provincial Park Nature Centre helped spread information on the WildSafeBC Bare Camping guidelines as well as information on safety practices while in wildlife country.

Table 3. Event locations, event numbers and number of visitors in 2022.

Event	# Events	Number of People Reached
Taghum Hall Harvest Festival	1 event	53
Kokanee Creek Provincial Park	2 events	193
Bears & Brews Trivia Night	1 event	24



Figure 7. Display booths at local community events.

Door-to-Door and Garbage Tagging

The WildSafeBC Nelson Program engaged in a targeted door-to-door campaign to provide information on bears and other wildlife present in areas with active attractant management and wildlife conflict issues. Targeted areas were chosen based on community reports, the WildSafeBC WARP map and from requests made by the local COS. Areas visited included Fairview, Uphill, Rosemont, North Shore communities including Johnstone Rd, Nasookin Road, 6 and 9 Mile areas, Balfour, Bonnington and Georama area. The door-to-door campaign work involved talking directly to people present at their homes at time of canvassing and leaving contact information and door hangers at residences where no direct conversations occurred. A total of 114 residents were spoken with and 728 door hangers were left (Figure 8). Residents that wanted more information could call and discuss their concerns. Nearly 81 hours were spent conducting door-to-door education.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection (Figure 8). During 2 outings, 5 bins were tagged. The program has reportedly been effective in past years. This WCC has observed garbage cans being stored outside, most notably in carports. With increasing awareness and many residents now adopting better practices, outside garbage storage and early morning setting out of garbage is improving but continues to remain an issue in higher conflict areas including Uphill and Fairview.



Figure 8. Information left during door-to-door campaign (left) and garbage tags left on a bin that was placed on the curb on the evening before collection (right).

Brochure Distribution

The WCC delivered brochures to outdoor product retailers, Selkirk Veterinary Hospital, Kokanee Mariner Store, Balfour Superette, popular trailheads, and Kokanee Creek Park Visitor Centre (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Brochures on wildlife species and safety distributed throughout the area.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Nelson program continued its tradition of providing seasonal press releases for the *Nelson Star*. WildSafeBC also contributed comments to the *Nelson Star* and *The Narwhal* regarding black bear conflicts in the region and ways to reduce them. The WildSafeBC Nelson Coordinator made radio appearances twice on Bounce Radio: 106.9 and regularly in the *What's On Nelson* weekly online newsletter.

The WildSafeBC Nelson program increased its presence on Facebook with over 50 posts this year (Figure 10). In 2022, the number of followers on the WildSafeBC Nelson Facebook page grew from 1,051 to 1,308 followers. WildSafeBC Nelson is also active on popular community pages in Nelson and surrounding areas, providing area specific information on local wildlife activity.

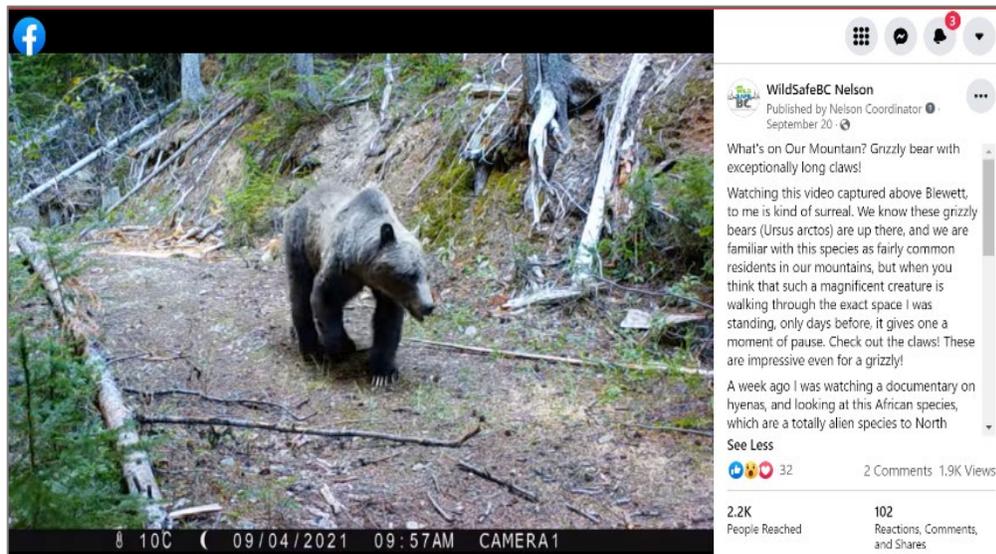


Figure 10. Example of a WildSafeBC Nelson Facebook page post.

Special Initiatives

Bear-resistant garbage bins

Bears accessing public garbage bins in Lakeside Park brought attention to the need for more bear-resistant bins in public spaces and an increased frequency of garbage pickup. The City of Nelson installed five new bear-resistant Haul-All bins in Lakeside Park and committed to installing more bear-resistant bins in the future, pending resource availability. WildSafeBC also recommended that the City of Nelson decommission open-faced, non-wildlife resistant, concrete garbage bins throughout the City.

Certified bear-resistant bins have been challenging for residents of Nelson and RDCK to access and purchase at a reasonable price. With the City of Nelson's investment in food recycling, the

City has not been purchasing bear-resistant containers and making them available at cost for residents in the region. WildSafeBC has suggested to the RDCK that they consider taking on this role for the benefit of residents in Area E and F.

Food Waste Recycler

WildSafeBC was invited to join the working group committee for the City of Nelson's 2023 initiative to provide food recycling devices to residents in an effort to reduce the amount of solid waste collected. This program is scheduled for City residents to access in 2023. It is the vision that such in-home counter-top devices will greatly reduce the amount of household solid waste for disposal and reduce the smells caused by garbage storage. With less organics in garbage, bears are less likely to receive a food reward. However, bears will likely continue to associate garbage with food for many years to come and garbage bins should continue to be stored securely.

Business Pledge

In 2021, WildSafeBC developed a program to encourage businesses to adopt practices that will reduce conflict with wildlife, to keep their staff and patrons safe, and to keep wildlife wild. Through these actions, businesses are setting 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 human-wildlife conflict reduction messaging. This program is free of charge and is valid for one year. Congratulations to Acorn+Oak for becoming the first business to take the Pledge and committing to reducing human-wildlife conflict!

Challenges and Opportunities

Improperly managed garbage and fruit/nut trees continue to be the main sources of human-wildlife conflict in the Nelson area. To address these challenges, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2023:

- Promote the use of bear-resistant garbage bins in all public spaces and encourage the City to decommission concrete open bins throughout the community.
- Continue education on attractant management and wildlife safety through door-to-door canvassing, presentations for general public and in schools, display booths, social media, and the press.
- Engage businesses using the WildSafeBC Business Pledge.
- Support campgrounds with implementing the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.
- Continue to foster and build relationships with local groups that share common goals.
- Explore solutions to continue to offer bear-resistant containers in the region.
- Work to encourage the amendment of municipal bylaws to include controls on planting fruit and nut-bearing trees on public property
- Continue to support residents in the proper care and management of fruit-bearing trees in the area.

Acknowledgments

The WCC would like to acknowledge the generous support it receives from its sponsors the Province of British Columbia, the Columbia Basin Trust, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the City of Nelson.

The WCC also values the vital support provided by Conservation Officers Nathan Smienk and Jason Hawkes, who were crucial in providing direction and guidance for a new WCC. A special thank you to fellow WildSafeBC Community Coordinator, Tara Pejski, for assistance with delivering the many elementary school presentations this fall. Also thanks to Anne and Rick Pidgeon, operators of Kokanee Creek Provincial Park campground, as well as the crew at the Kokanee Creek Visitor Centre for their commitment and hard work in keeping wildlife wild and campers educated and safe. Thank you to local bear biologist Grant MacHutchon for always being available to answer questions and provide insight into bear behaviours. Thank you also to Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions for collaborations on electric fencing in Area E. Finally, thank you to *The Nelson Star*, Bounce Radio and *What's On Weekly* for promoting our WildSafeBC messaging to the community at large and helping us deliver our safety information to a wider audience.