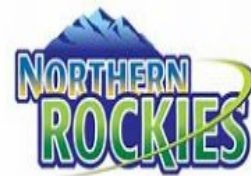
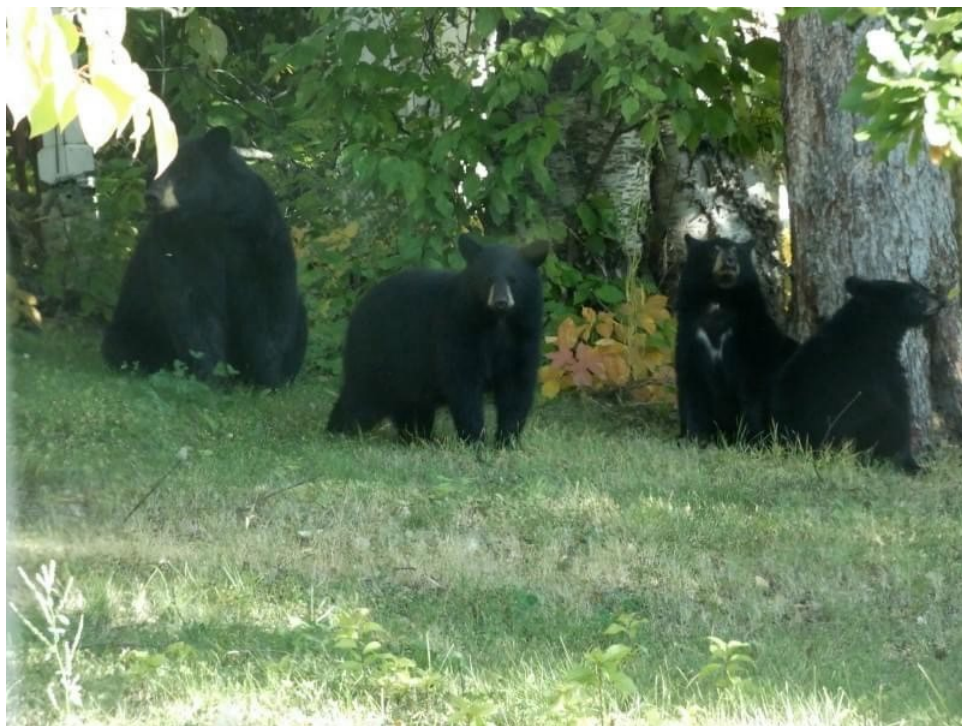


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

Northern Rockies

Prepared by: Kim Eglinski

WildSafeBC Northern Rockies Coordinator



Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC program has been working to prevent human-wildlife conflict in BC through collaboration, education and community solutions since 1998. This year was the fourth season that the program was delivered in the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality (NRRM). The NRRM is located in the traditional territory of Treaty 8 and Fort Nelson First Nation and includes the communities of Fort Nelson, and the unincorporated settlements of Toad River, Muncho Lake, Liard River, Tetsa River, Prophet River, and surrounding areas (Figure 1).

Efforts were focused on the Fort Nelson town site, which has the highest density of people. In 2022, there were 153 black bear reports. This is higher than the 136 calls in 2021 as well as the 6-year average of 129. There was a sow and three cubs that hung around town for most of August which generated several calls and is likely the reason for the increase. There were no grizzly bear reports. While garbage remained the most reported attractant from residents, there was a noticeable increase in reports regarding fruit trees this year. The WildsafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) received more phone calls and messages from residents than in previous years. The WCC performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community:

- 25 percent growth in follower on local WildSafeBC Facebook page
- 1 bear safety and bear spray demonstration was given to the Fort Nelson Heritage Museum staff
- 5 bear awareness and safety presentations were provided in the community
- 6 WildSafe Ranger Programs were administered
- 5 display booths were setup over the season
- 1 Business Pledge was signed by the Fort Nelson Heritage Museum
- 296 homes were reached through door-to-door education
- 194 'warning' stickers were placed on garbage bins left on the curb too early, too late, or overflowing

The Conservation Officer Service continued to work collaboratively with WildSafeBC in 2022. The NRRM Fire Rescue (Bylaw) had capacity issues throughout the season and it is hoped that an increased level of collaboration will exist in 2023 similar to that of 2020 or 2021 levels. While there has been no formal resolution from the Mayor and Council, WildSafeBC hopes the NRRM will continue to pursue the Bear Smart Community status, which supports our messaging of "keeping wildlife wild and our community safe." Mayor and Council did approve the Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan that was completed in the summer.

WildSafeBC NRRM Program Coverage

The map displays the program boundary as a large orange-shaded area covering parts of central and northern British Columbia. Key locations include Fort St. John, Hazelton, Bulkley Valley, Skeena River, Fraser Canyon, Kamloops, Okanagan Valley, Kelowna, Vernon, Prince George, and Terrace. The map also shows major highways like Highway 97, Highway 60, and Highway 80. A scale bar indicates distances up to 200 km.

Inset Map:

A small inset map in the top right corner shows the location of the main map area within the province of British Columbia.

Legend:

- Program Boundary (Orange shaded area)

Logo:

WILD SAFE BC
British Columbia Conservation Foundation

Map created on 4/23/2019 by Mitchell Syroen. Google Maps basemap obtained via QuickMapsServices. Program boundary data from the Legally Defined Administrative Areas of BC ESRI FileGDB, obtained from the Province of British Columbia's GeoB Data Catalogue. Data is projected in WGS84 Pseudo-Mercator.

Figure 1. WildSafeBC Northern Rockies Program coverage area.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2022 Season	4
Wildlife Activity	4
WildSafe Ranger Program.....	5
Presentations to Community Groups	6
Display Booths	7
BC Goes Wild.....	7
Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging	8
Social Media and Press.....	11
Collaborations	11
Indigenous Awareness and Engagement	11
Business Pledges	11
Special Initiatives	12
Challenges and Opportunities	12
Acknowledgements.....	13

Table of Figures

Figure 1. WildSafeBC Northern Rockies Program coverage area.	2
Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to November 27, 2022.	4
Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP by species, January 1, 2016 to November 26, 2022..	5
Figure 4. Presentation to children at the Fort Nelson Family Development Center	5
Figure 5. Bear Spray Demonstration Fort Nelson Heritage Museum staff.	6
Figure 6. Display booths at Visitor Information Center (left) and Trail Mix Run (right).....	7
Figure 7. Information packages for door-to-door canvassing.....	8
Figure 8. Number of garbage bins tagged for being put out in Fort Nelson prior to collection time of 5:00 am on collection day (June 1 – October 10 2022).	9
Figure 9. Number of garbage bins overflowing on pick up day (June 1-October 10th).....	9
Figure 10. Bins left out overnight after collection day.	10
Figure 11. Overflowing bin on collection day.	10
 Table 1. Presentations given by WCC in NRRM for 2022 WildSafeBC season.	6
Table 2. Display booths set up and attendance for the 2022 WildSafeBC Northern Rockies program.	7

Cover Photo: Black Bear sow and cubs that were in Fort Nelson throughout August 2022.

Highlights from the 2022 Season

Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) and through the 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 the Northern Rockies includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 26, 2022.

There were 195 black bear reports this year, which is close to the 5-year average of 129 (Figure 2). One bear or family unit may be responsible for several reports. Black bear reports peaked in September when bears entered hyperphagia, a period of intense eating in preparation for hibernation. The increase in black bear reports was partially due to a family unit (sow with 3 cubs) hanging around town for most of September. This was concerning to residents and this generated many reports to the RAPP line. Further to that, there was an increase in black bears that were lethally destroyed this year, which made space for new black bears to enter the community in search of food sources.

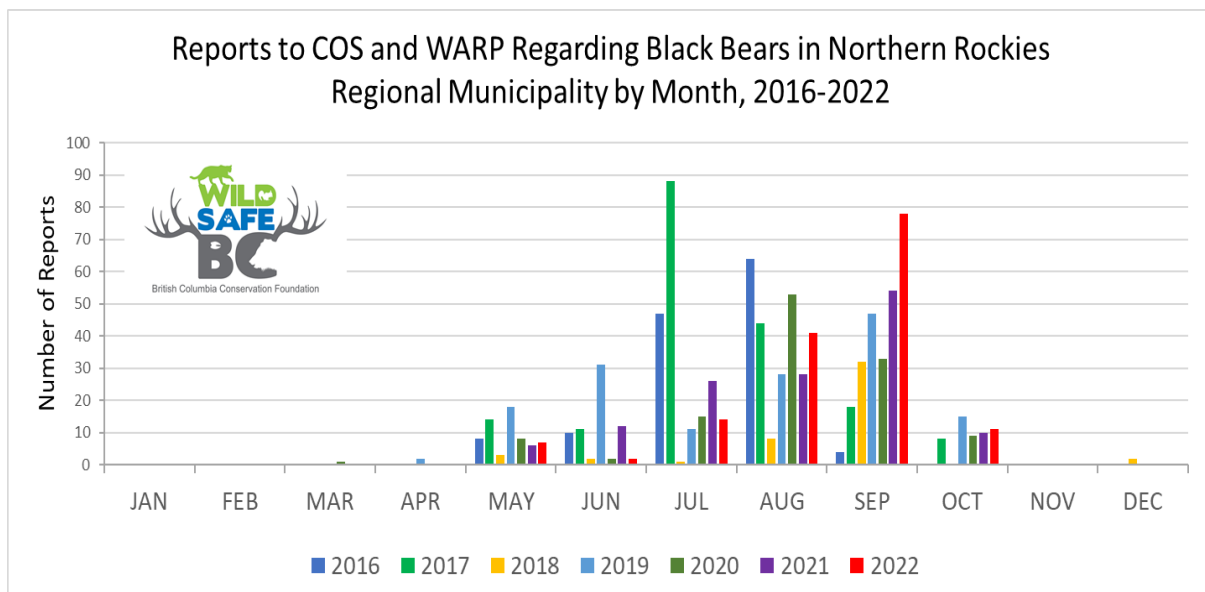


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to November 27, 2022.

In terms of other wildlife reports for the region, there were no grizzly bear sightings in close proximity to town. The number of deer reports decreased from 2021. In 2021, there were two injured deer that generated calls and those deer have not been seen in quite some time (Figure 3). The WCC observed an increase in deer within the community foraging on cedar shrubs and other vegetation. Diets appear to be adapting to other tree species such as pine and spruce.

A number of calls were also received about residents feeding deer. The WCC provided the bylaw with information to follow up on these reports.

There was a noticeable increase in discussion from residents regarding fruit trees being a common attractant for wildlife. A late, wet spring and a hot, dry summer, may have affected natural food availability, which would explain wildlife species accessing trees for food more often this year.

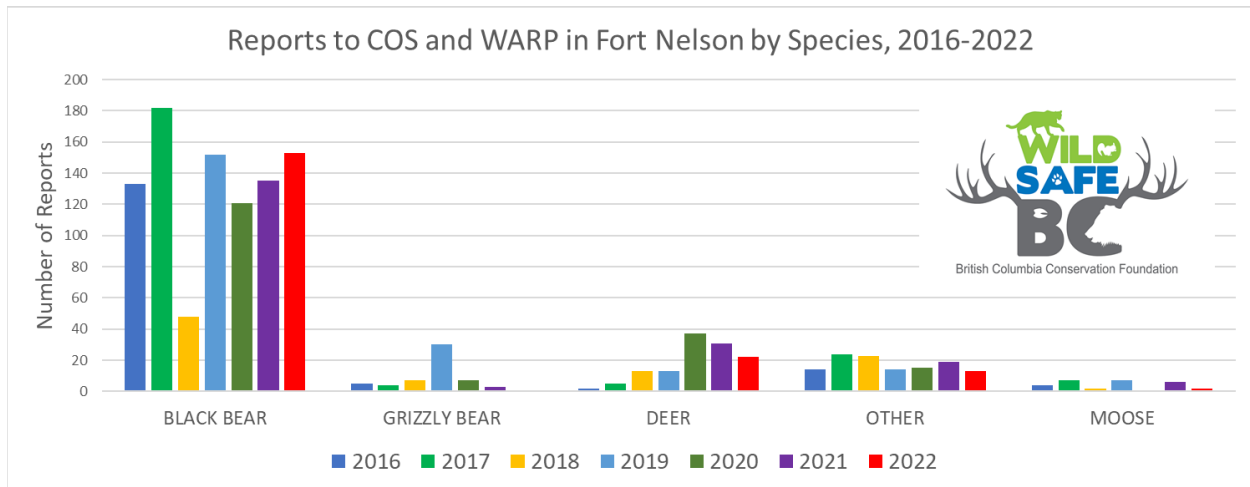


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP by species, January 1, 2016 to November 26, 2022.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. In June of 2022, the WCC delivered 3 WRP presentations to 44 students in grades 8, 9 and 10 at Fort Nelson Secondary School. One program given in July was for families through the Fort Nelson Family Development Center (Figure 4). Two programs were delivered in September to groups at The Street Festival and the Fort Nelson Public Library.



Figure 4. Presentation to children at the Fort Nelson Family Development Center

Presentations to Community Groups

WildSafeBC recognizes that there is much to learn about how best to safely coexist with the many species of animals found in British Columbia. Becoming more knowledgeable about what leads to conflict and how to reduce it involves developing an understanding of wildlife behaviour and biology, factors that lead to conflict, and the solutions available to reduce conflict and stay safe. The best bear encounter is the one you avoid, and much can be done to avoid negative interactions with wildlife. However, bear spray has been shown to be over 90% effective in preventing injury to people and lethal consequences for bears. Bear spray is only safe and effective if one is knowledgeable on how and when to use it, how to transport it safely, and with practice on removing it from the holster and discharging it. A bear or other wildlife encounter can happen quickly and WildSafeBC training gives participants the opportunity to practice how to pull the bear spray out of the holster, remove the safety, and discharge it in less than 2 seconds (Figure 5).

The WCC gave five community presentations to 22 attendees (Table 1). Three other scheduled presentations were cancelled because no one was in attendance.

Table 1. Presentations given by WCC in NRRM for 2022 WildSafeBC season.

ORGANIZATION	COURSE TYPE	ATTENDEES
Fort Nelson Heritage Museum	Bear Safety & Bear Spray Demo	6
Fort Nelson Visitor Centre	Bear Safety & Awareness	15 over 3 separate presentations
Fort Nelson Public Library	Bear Safety & Awareness	1



Figure 5. Bear Spray Demonstration Fort Nelson Heritage Museum staff.

Display Booths

WildSafeBC set up five public engagement booths this season (Figure 6). Two were held at the Visitor Information Center and were tourist specific. Additionally, one booth was setup on Canada Day at the Rec Centre, another at the Street Festival hosted by the Museum, and finally the WCC closed out the year with a booth at Millennium Park at the Trail Mix Half Marathon. There were 239 people that attended these booths during the 2022 WildSafeBC season (Table 2).

Table 2. Display booths set up and attendance for the 2022 WildSafeBC Northern Rockies program.

EVENT	ORGANIZATION	ATTENDEES
	Visitor Info Center (2)	14
Canada Day	Fort Nelson Rec Center	75
Street Festival	Fort Nelson Heritage Museum	100
Millennium Park	Trail Mix Half Marathon	50



Figure 6. Display booths at Visitor Information Center (left) and Trail Mix Run (right).

BC Goes Wild

BC Goes Wild is a campaign to celebrate wildlife in BC and it occurs in September, which is typically the month when human-bear conflicts are at their highest. On September 9th, WildSafeBC partnered with the Northern Rockies Arts Council and set up an outdoor booth at the 2022 Street Festival. Along with our information booth, there was a kids table where children were encouraged to color or draw a picture for the 2022 WildSafeBC Coloring Contest. We also handed out scavenger hunt sheets. Our interactive table engaged the kids who were coming in to learn about wildlife attractants for the duration of the evening. There were 300 people that attended the Street Festival and we look forward to partnering with the Arts Council again in 2023.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

This year there was an increased focus on door-to-door canvassing (Figure 7). Door-to-door canvassing was completed multiple times during the season and just over 300 houses were visited. The WCC focused on areas with historically high levels of wildlife conflicts as well as high-density townhomes and condominiums. The WCC reminded homeowners about key information regarding their bins, storage, and curbside pickup. A total of 247 homes were reached via door hangers and 50 people were reached through in-person conversations. Another 25 homes were visited that had apple trees and the Fruit Gleaning Poster was distributed to these residences.

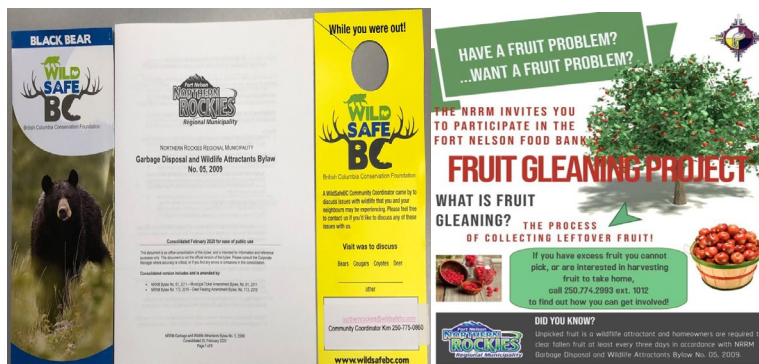


Figure 7. Information packages for door-to-door canvassing.

The purpose of garbage tagging is to remind residents that garbage left on the curb is a wildlife attractant. Bright yellow “warning” stickers are placed on bins that have been put out too early or brought in too late. The NRRM bylaw states that bins cannot be placed at the curb prior to 5:00 am the morning of pick up and must be removed from the curb by 7:00 pm the same day. Garbage tagging was conducted between 10:00 pm and 11:00 pm, two days a week over several weeks (Figure 8). Random days were spent identifying overflowing bins (Figure 9). Bins left out overnight were usually tagged between 8:00 am and 9:00 am the day after collection.

In 2022, the focus was on carts set out early with attractants as well as overflowing carts. While empty carts can still be a visual and odorous cue that draws bears into the community, it is the full bins with food rewards that leads to food conditioning. Food conditioning is a learned behaviour where wildlife associate people, and their activities, with a food reward. This can lead to an increased presence of bears in the community and the chance for a negative encounter.

After noticing a high amount of bins being left at the curb overnight and an increase in bear activity the WCC started tagging bins that were still on the curb between 10:00pm and 11:00pm or bins that were still out the day after pickup between 8:00 am and 9:00 am (Figure 10). The intention of the tagging sessions was to make residents aware of the issue and provide a visual cue for residents to realize the reason for the timeframe setup by the municipality bylaw.

A total of 24 bins were stickered for having repeated the behavior more than once and these required follow up education from the WCC. There were four bins that received education stickers three or more times. Those with multiple instances of having their bins out early or late

were forwarded to NRRM bylaw services for further follow up. While the bin tagging education program is successful in changing human behaviors over 85% of the time based on how many bins were not out during follow up surveys by the WCC, some residents are still non-compliant with the NRRM's bylaws. Additional education is necessary to get closer to 100% compliance.

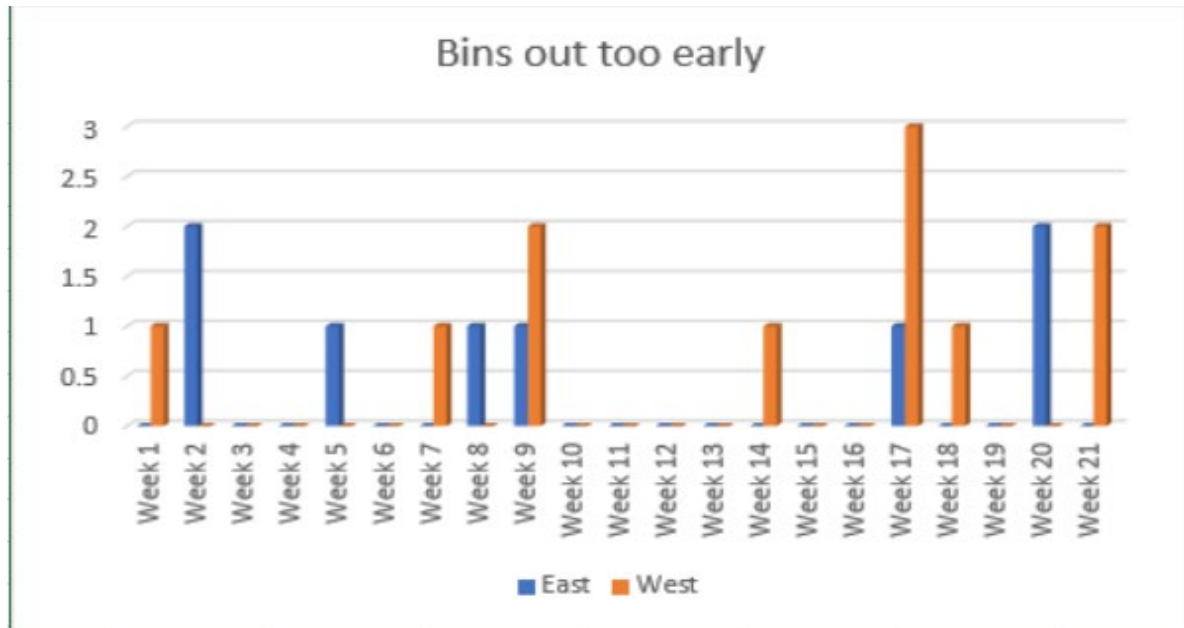


Figure 8. Number of garbage bins tagged for being put out in Fort Nelson prior to collection time of 5:00 am on collection day (June 1 – October 10 2022).

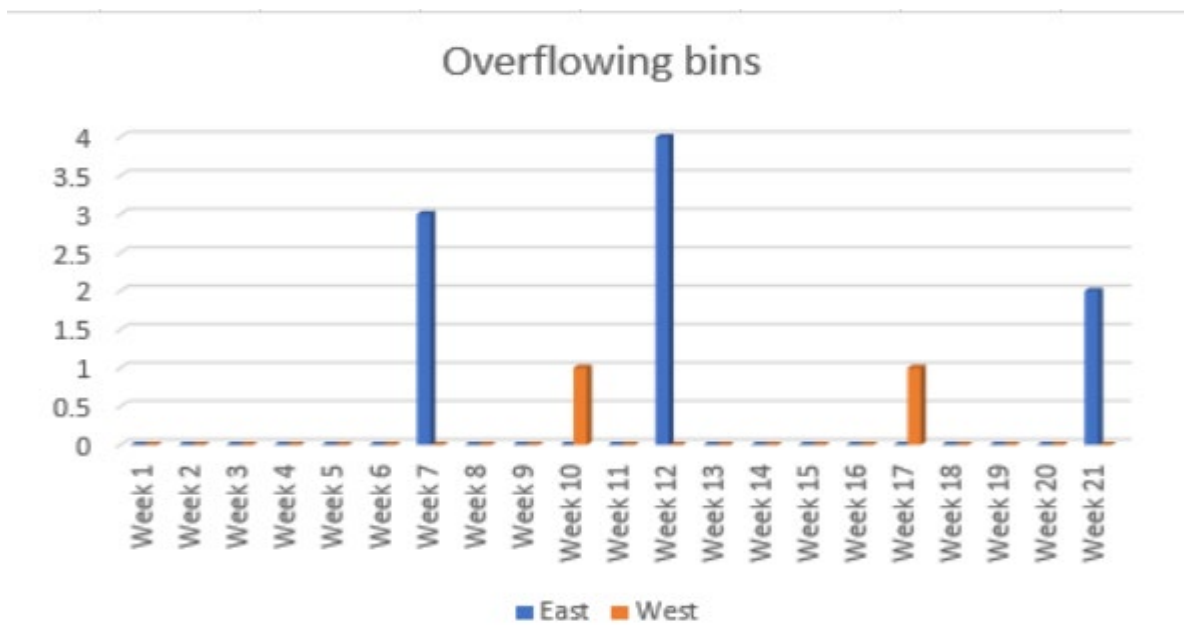


Figure 9. Number of garbage bins overflowing on pick up day (June 1-October 10th).

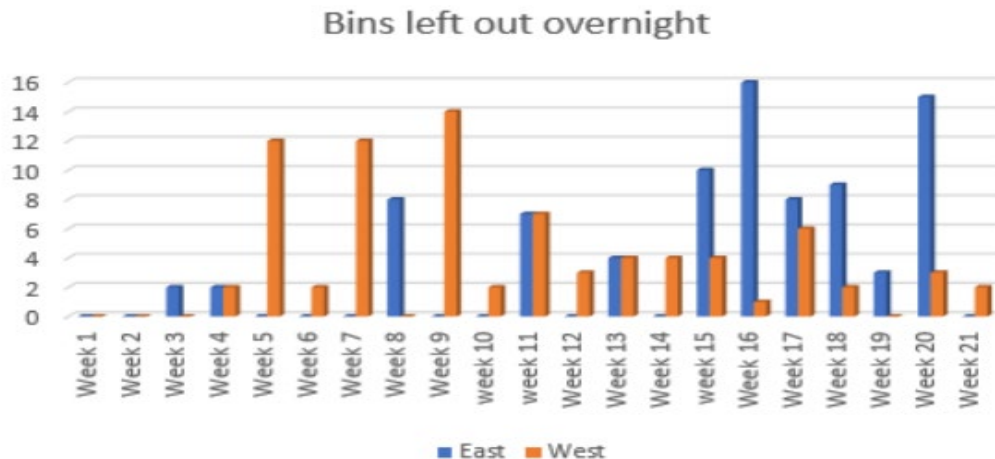


Figure 10. Bins left out overnight after collection day.

It should be noted that weather is an important factor when it comes to leaving bins out. For example, when it was raining or snowing, there was a larger number of bins still out on the street past the indicated timeframe allowed following collection. We also saw an increase of bins left out on Thursday evenings if there was a long weekend to follow. The WCC also noticed bins out on the curb four or five days after pickup; the WCC attributes this to tenants that have vacated rental properties.

Overall, we were pleased with the low number of garbage bins being set out too early and most days we did not tag a single bin on either collection day. There are an average of 761 bins that are emptied during garbage pick-up every week. This indicates that the vast majority of residents comply with the NRRM bylaw.

At the request of the NRRM Bylaw team, the WCC also identified 11 bins that were overflowing on the morning of collection. This number is significantly down from 2021. The WCC only tagged bins that were grossly overflowing (Figure 11). These residences were followed up with by the WCC with additional educational information. There was no repeat behaviour.

Error! Bookmark not defined.

Error! Bookmark not defined.



Figure 11. Overflowing bin on collection day.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Northern Rockies Facebook page grew 25% from 362 followers in 2021 to 453 followers in November 2022. Efforts were made throughout the season to tag the NRRM and the COS in most posts to increase our overall reach. There was more engagement on our Facebook page with comments this season which allowed the WCC to address misconceptions and take notice of those who are supportive of and aware of WildSafeBC messaging in the region. The WCC also noticed an increase in direct contacts made through Facebook Messenger.

Collaborations

The WCC continued to strengthen the collaboration efforts with the COS who continued to provide guidance and support. The WCC directed homeowners with too much fruit to the Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Society, the organization that took over Fort Nelson Fruit Gleaning last year, and with the group that operates the local food bank. The WCC also distributed 25 letters for the NRRM to residents living on Tamarack Crescent and Cottonwood Road in an effort to get the remaining “bear-resistant” bins out of storage and into the hands of residents.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC tagged the Fort Nelson First Nation in most Facebook posts. WildSafeBC was unable to set up a booth at the Fort Nelson First Nation (FNFN) Treaty days in 2022 but this could be an option for further engagement in 2023. The WCC responded to a half dozen requests for advice about bear conflicts at Fort Nelson First Nation which included bears accessing garbage, and a bear causing property damage. FNFN may be interested in participating/partnering in 2023 and follow up should be done early in 2023.

Business Pledges

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to adopt practices that will reduce conflict with wildlife to keep their staff and patrons safe and 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 the WildSafeBC safety and conflict reduction information.

The WCC was successful this year in getting the Fort Nelson Heritage Museum to commit and take the pledge, complete the requirements, and become a WildSafeBC business.

Special Initiatives

The WCC continued to work with the Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Society. In 2021, the Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Society took over the management and operation of the fruit gleaning group in all aspects. The community's abundance of fruit is now shared with the local food bank. The goal of the initiative is to match homeowners with too much fruit on their trees with residents that want/need fruit. Unpicked fruit remaining on both municipal and residential fruit trees continues to be a problem in the Northern Rockies.

Challenges and Opportunities

The NRRM encompasses almost 10% of the entire province, roughly 85,000 square kilometers. Approximately 3,000 of the 5,300 people in NRRM reside in Fort Nelson. The WCC focused efforts on the more densely populated community of Fort Nelson. The WCC hopes to reach out to the communities of Toad River, Fort Nelson First Nation, and Prophet River First Nation in 2023.

Volunteers are needed for safety reasons to aid in garbage tagging as well as door-to-door canvassing. Volunteers are helpful for increasing efficiencies and provide physical help when setting up tents and booth displays. This year, we successfully obtained one volunteer. Additionally, the WCC was supported by the COS and a family member who helped set up a tent for display booths. More volunteers would help with increasing the reach of the WCC.

Although we did see an increase in bear reports to the RAPP line, some community members continue to prefer to post bear sightings on social media as opposed to reporting sightings to the COS. WildSafeBC urges community members to report sightings early so that they appear on WARP which is readily available to anyone who has internet access. It also provides valuable information for prioritizing areas for door-to-door education and other campaigns.

Garbage was the most reported attractant in the community and resulted in bears wandering along community streets and into people's yards, which affected community safety and enjoyment when spending time outdoors. In an effort to address the improper storage of garbage in the community, the following initiatives are recommended for 2023:

- Host a community meeting to bring partners and collaborators together to provide the community with detailed information regarding the combined activities and the desired outcome to not only encourage understanding but also to promote community participation.
- Continue to support the NRRM in working towards Bear Smart Community status by implementing the recommendations in the HBCMP that was completed in 2022.
- Continue door-to-door campaigns throughout the season in hotspot areas.
- Continue to promote the use of WARP and reporting wildlife conflicts to the COS.
- Continue to gain more followers on the WildSafeBC Fort Nelson Facebook page.

- Make the WildSafeBC Facebook Fort Nelson page the place where residents can go to seek current, valuable, and factual information along with the NRRM Wildlife Encounters website.
- Increase human-deer conflict reduction education in a proactive manner in order to avoid the human-deer conflicts reported in other BC communities. Once established, urban deer issues can be very challenging and expensive to resolve.
- Through the WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program, encourage businesses to adopt practices that will reduce conflict and increase community awareness.
- Increase Bear Spray Demonstrations and Bear Aware & Safety Presentations

Fruit trees continue to be a source of attractants in the community that draw wildlife into residential areas and keeps wildlife there for longer periods. This affects the safety of the neighbourhood. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community and would continue to benefit from increased education and fruit gleaning activities similar to what we achieved this year. To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives are recommended for 2023:

- Municipality to implement suggestions in the Arborists report received in 2022
- Electric fence demonstration(s)
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information, and door-to-door canvassing.
- Continue to connect residents to the Fort Nelson Aboriginal Friendship Center who oversees the Fort Nelson Fruit Gleaning Group.

Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank the NRRM, the Province of BC, and the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) for funding this project. Thank you to the COS for their expertise in current and historical wildlife conflicts within the region. Thanks to Susan Walsh, our volunteer, who was instrumental in helping to make this year a success. The WCC would also like to thank the residents of Fort Nelson for continuing to embrace the WildSafeBC Program. A special thank you to the Kamloops BCCF team for their hard work. Their advice, ongoing support, and various skills in communication, budgeting, and organization were appreciated and helped the WildSafeBC Northern Rockies program have a successful and impactful season.