

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

Town of Princeton and RDOS Area H

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) for the WildSafeBC Princeton Program between April 6th and November 30th, 2022. The Program covers the Town of Princeton and the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) Area H (Figure 1).

A wet and cool spring with a larger abundance of vegetation growth than prior years in the valley and cooler temperatures delaying the snowpack melt in the surrounding mountains influenced wildlife activity around Princeton and Area H. Then a hot and dry July thru October with September forest fires changed wildlife behavior again.

While the WCC was anecdotally told about human-wildlife conflict, official reporting of wildlife activity to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) was lower than prior years. Black bears were the most reported wildlife at 35, followed by deer at 27, cougars at 5 and others at 12 for a total of 79 area reports shown in the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) for the 2022 season. The majority of conflicts involved deer attacking dogs while out for a walk or in their yard, bears getting into garbage, cougar sightings and injured wildlife.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) hosted outreach activities around Princeton and the RDOS with the goal of preventing human-wildlife conflict. The education provided is positive and neutral with actionable information about how to live, work, play and grow safely in wildlife country. This year the WCC collaborated with the Town of Princeton, Conservation Officer Service, individuals, community groups, schools, libraries, and businesses.

The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the 2022 season:

- 8 Bear Spray Workshops reached 75 participants
- 18 educational display booths reached 2326 people
- 11 WildSafe Ranger Program presentations reached 195 students and teachers
- 148 homes were reached through door-to-door canvassing
- 27 garbage tagging evenings with 248 bins tagged
- 90 Facebook posts increased informed followers by 65% going from 302 to 465
- 5 businesses signed the WildSafeBC Business Pledge

The BC Goes Wild Event this September spanned across three events with a combination of educational booths and bear spray workshops that included education about wildlife behavior and motivation, factors that contribute to human-wildlife conflict and how to avoid it, bear spray laws, safe transportation, first aid, and wildlife encounter training with bear spray deployment in a variety of situations.

Garbage tagging work saw an increase in bins on the curb at night, possibly due to unexpected changes in the curbside garbage pickup schedule and less door-to-door canvassing showing a need for neighborhoods that received in person education in 2021 to be reminded to store their garbage inside for 2022 and ongoing. After a few tagged bin reminders and some door-to-door

education in hotspots, neighborhoods reduced garbage out on the curb early practices, illustrating the benefit of the WildSafeBC program.

The WCC is grateful to all the residents for their respect, open dialogue and efforts to manage their attractants. A huge thank you to the Princeton Town Staff, Mayor and Council, Bylaw Officer, Conservation Officer Service, RDOS, Province of BC and BC Conservation Foundation for supporting the WildSafeBC Princeton and RDOS Area H Program and understanding the importance of having an education program to reduce human-wildlife conflict. Thank you for helping to keep the wildlife wild and communities safe.

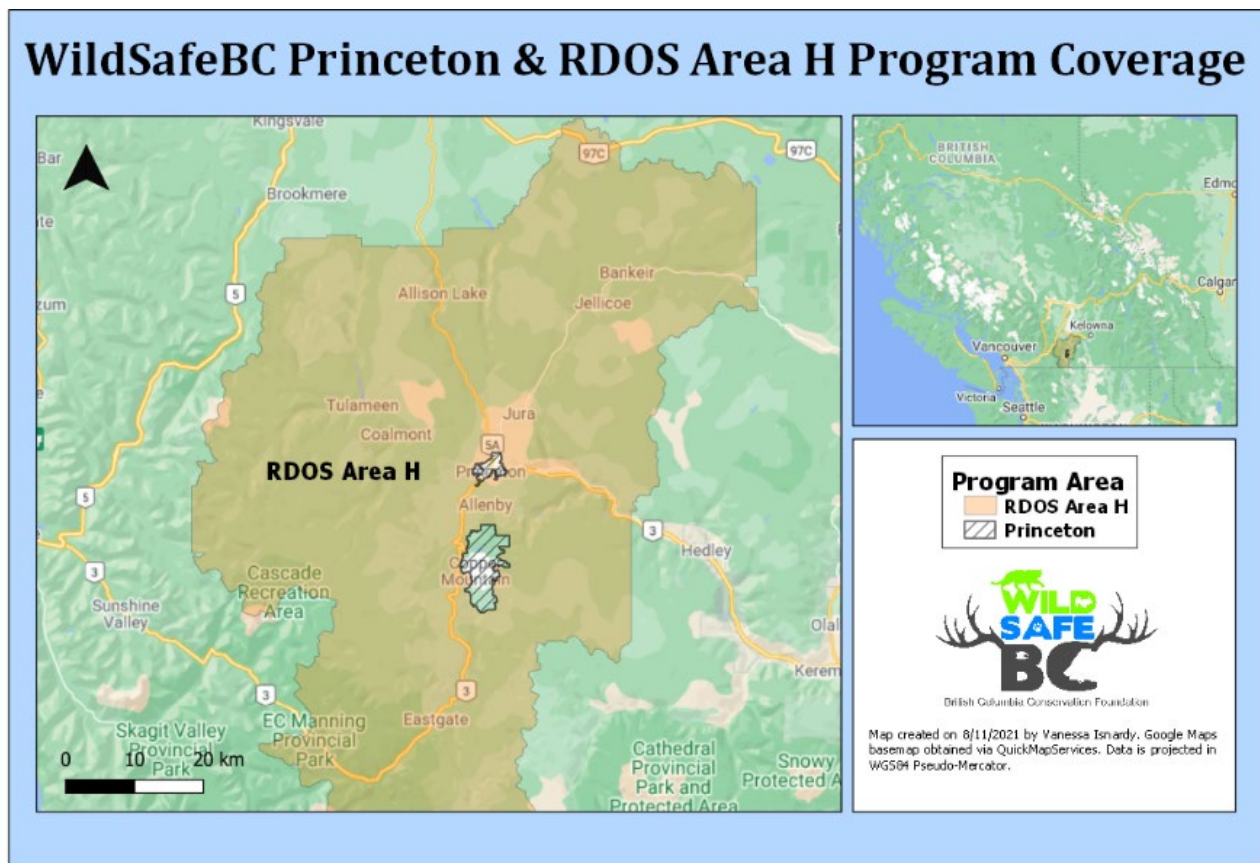


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Town of Princeton and RDOS Area H program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: WildSafeBC Goes Wild September 10, 2022 event.

Highlights from the 2022 Season

Wildlife Activity

The Town of Princeton is surrounded by ideal wildlife habitat and has multiple wildlife corridors transecting the community with the Similkameen and Tulameen rivers, the Kettle Valley Railway Trail, the China Creek and park greenspaces and hillsides between the valleys. Surrounding Princeton is an expanse of ranches, large acreages, crown land and compact recreational communities that are usually near water. All areas see an abundance of wildlife passing through that fluctuates with the weather and seasons. This year had a wet, cool spring with 94.6mm of rain in April, 92.1 mm of rain in May, and 69.7 mm of rain in June. This spring weather delayed the melting of the snowpack and increased vegetation growth in the valley bottoms. This pattern of weather used to be typical but in recent years springs have been warmer and drier.

Wildlife conflict reports to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) decreased in 2022 compared to prior years (Figure 2) with a total of 79 reports made to the COS RAPP line and then recorded in the WildSafeBC Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). The WCC received many requests from residents for solutions to conflicts with bears and deer. The decrease in conflict reports may be attributed to residents reaching out directly to WildSafeBC for wildlife conflict prevention advice as they program is a well-established presence in the community.

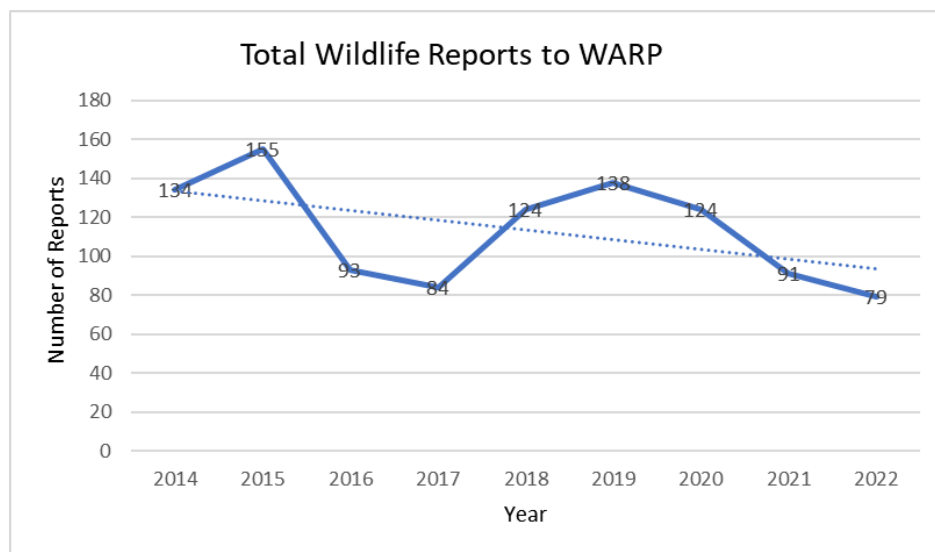


Figure 2. Reports regarding wildlife to WARP by year in Princeton, January 1st, 2014 to November 30, 2022.

Similar to prior years, black bears were the most reported wildlife at 35, followed by deer at 27 cougars at 5 and others such as moose, elk, bobcat and raptors at 12. Anecdotally many more animals were hit by vehicles in addition to wildlife in conflict. Additional information in reports from WARP, such as encounter type or attractant type were not available to the WCC this year.

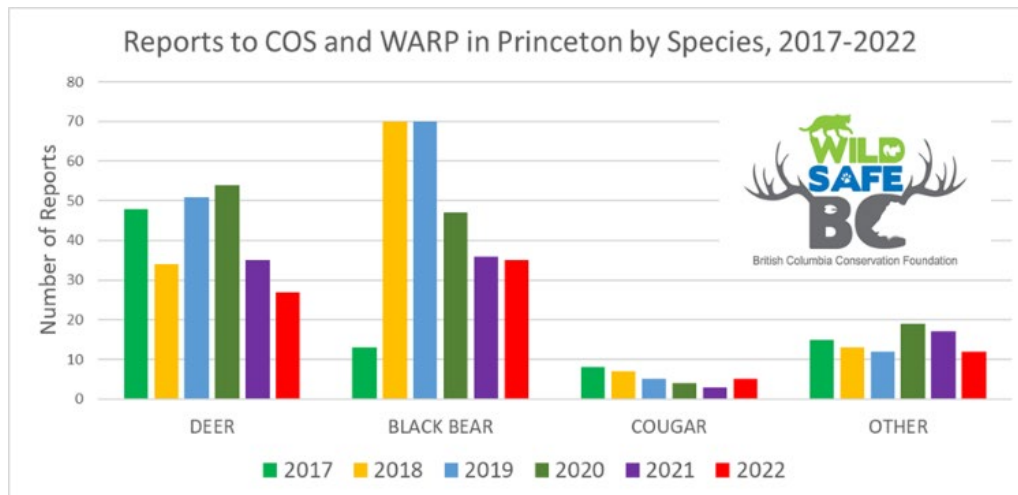


Figure 3. Wildlife by species reported to COS RAPP line and recorded in the WARP.

The lush spring sustained local wildlife through the summer months of July and August, however September and October continued to be very dry and hot and saw an increase in bears looking for food in the community in the fall (Figure 4). The bears were able to access food from businesses, town, and residential garbage bins and stayed in the area looking for food at night around buildings. As the fall progressed, the bears caused property damage to access garbage. Bears were seen chasing deer but when encountering people the bears displayed behavior of trying to avoid humans.

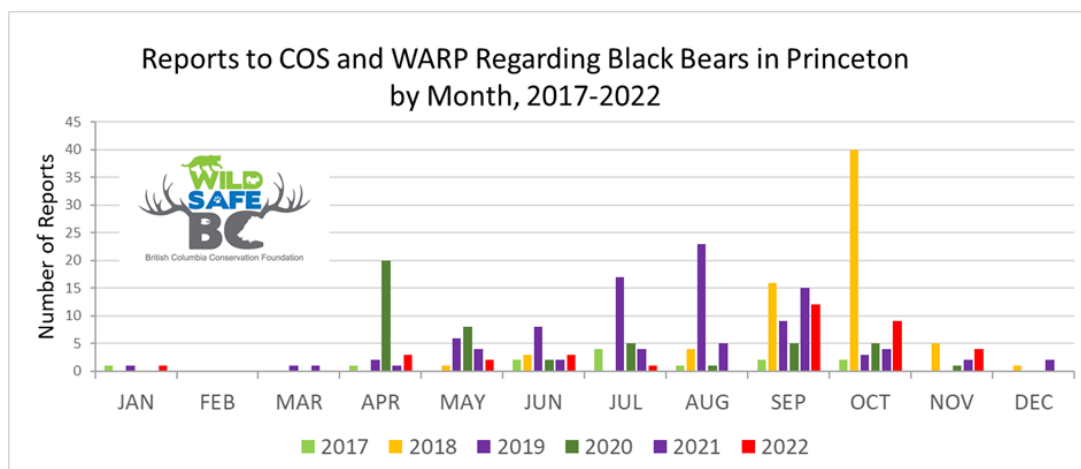


Figure 4. Black bear reports to WARP by month in Princeton from January 1st, 2017 to November 30, 2022.

Reports to COS of conflict with deer decreased in 2022 but anecdotally the WCC experienced and heard of many aggressive encounters with female deer in the spring and summer. Many of our urban deer population were observed as being pregnant and exhibited aggressive behaviours late into June. The abundance of lush vegetation also created more cover for the fawns to hide in around local trails and the off-leash dog park creating more human-deer

encounters. Conflicts often involved a dog being attacked by a doe while out for a walk or in its own yard. There were also anecdotal reports of loose dogs chasing deer as well as reports of people feeding deer.

Coyotes and rats were also mentioned to the WCC as a concern with increasing populations in the area.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program shapes the future of our community by teaching youth wildlife knowledge and awareness, building an understanding about what attracts wildlife into urban areas, and how people can reduce human-wildlife conflict. This is followed by wildlife encounters safety skills. This season there were 11 presentations that reached 195 people (Table 1). Parents and teachers later commented on their children's increased awareness of wildlife and engagement in attractant management. Some of these activities also included playing wildlife identification bingo and walking along the Kettle Valley River looking for signs of wildlife activity (Figure 5).

Table 1. WildSafe Ranger presentations provided in 2022.

Event	Presentations	Grade/Age	Youth
Hedley Library	3	All Ages	28
Summer Fun Zone	1	Age: 6 - 14	25
Vermilion Forks Elementary	6	Grade: 4 - 7	132
Princeton & District Community Services	1	All Ages	10



Figure 5. WildSafe Ranger Program in 2022.

Presentations

The WCC provided 8 presentations to 75 participants (Figure 6). Presentations focused on wildlife safety, attractant management and safe bear spray handling. Large Businesses paid for the inert bear spray for their staff and also participated in the Business Pledge after learning more about the WildSafeBC Program. In addition, contact was made with people who had just moved to Princeton for work and wanted to know more about how to increase safety for their families.

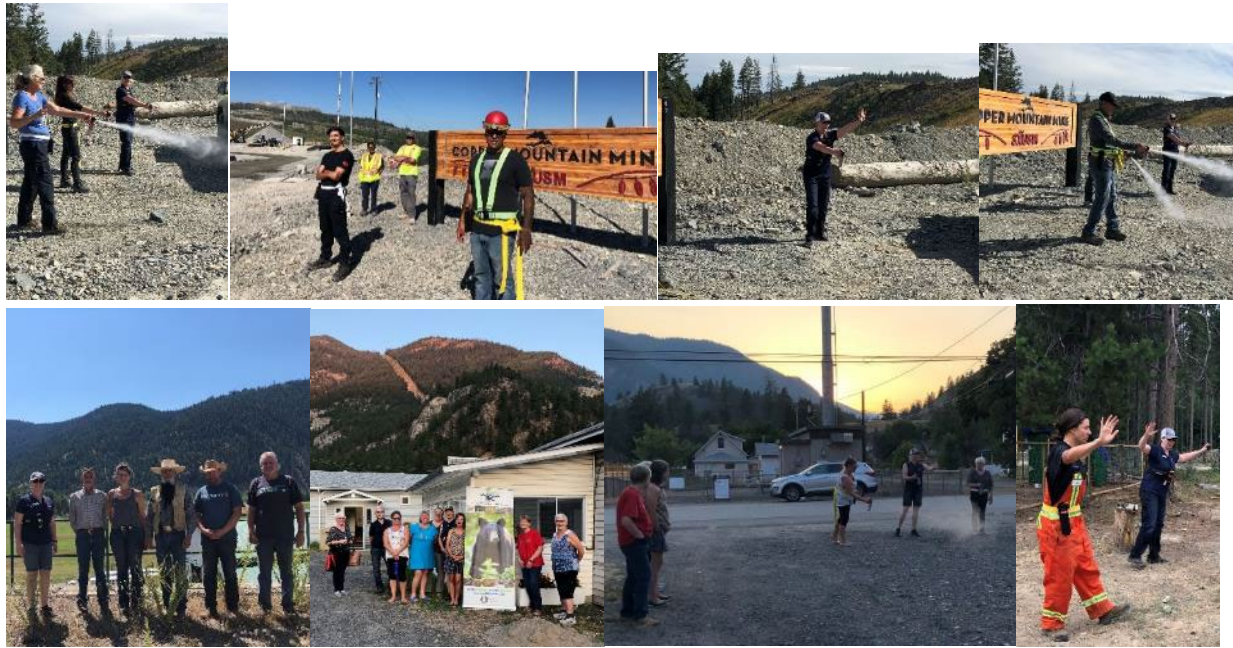


Figure 6. Presentations provided by the WCC to local groups on Wildlife Awareness and Safety Skills.

Display Booths



Figure 7. Display booths hosted throughout the season and around the community.

The WCC hosted 18 outdoor educational booths (Figure 7) this season and reached 2,926 people (Table 2). Approximately half of those people were full-time residents in Princeton and

Area H, the other half were vacationing or visiting for the day. Typical experiences shared by the public were vacationers coming to see the wildlife and feeding the deer and locals seeing bears, encountering aggressive deer while out for a walk with their dog and deer attacking dogs in residents' yards.

Table 2. Booths held at various locations in Princeton and Area H.

Location	No. Of People	Date
Veteran Square	76	May 7, 2022
Veteran's Square	175	May 14, 2022
Princeton Exhibition Grounds	680	June 11, 2022
Princeton Exhibition Grounds	200	June 12, 2022
Veteran's Square	75	June 25, 2022
Veteran's Square	400	July 1, 2022
Veteran's Square	50	July 2, 2022
Veteran's Square	75	July 9, 2022
Veteran's Square	75	July 14, 2022
Veteran's Square	55	July 23, 2022
Tulameen Fire Hall	370	July 30, 2022
Missezula Lake	220	July 31, 2022
Veteran's Square	110	August 6, 2022
Veteran's Square	30	August 13, 2022
Veteran's Square	85	August 20, 2022
Veteran's Square	65	September 10, 2022
Veteran's Square	120	September 17, 2022
Veteran's Square	65	September 24, 2022

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 highest. This year the WCC hosted three full day events of an educational display at the Community Market with local BBQ's joining in to help attract people as well as a Bear Spray Workshop was offered in the afternoon on these event days. Participants were thankful that the Town of Princeton was providing these workshops and expressed that they felt more prepared to encounter wild and urban wildlife and remain safe in such circumstances (Cover Page Photo and Figure 8).



Figure 8. BC Goes Wild Event held in September 2022.

Door-to-Door Education, Social Media and Press

Door-to-door education has proven to be one of the most effective avenues of increasing public knowledge and compliance. It brings the relevance of an attractant management program right to the residents at their front door, while providing information and answering questions about living in wildlife country. Door-to-door education canvassing reached 148 homes with 46 of these being in person conversations and 102 homes that received door hangers. This campaign was focused on neighborhoods with high numbers of garbage bins out at night and showed great results with people following through with adjusting their behaviors and keeping their bins secured until the morning of collection. While out in the community the WCC noticed that there is an increase in new residents to the area that have moved here from larger urban centers.

Social media and press article releases distributed educational information that were focused on relevant and seasonal wildlife behavior, WildSafeBC community events, wildlife activity and best practices to manage attractants so that wildlife passing through the community using one of the many wildlife corridors do not notice an attractant and then have a reason to stay in the community. The WildSafeBC Princeton Facebook page grew by 65% in 2022 from 302 to 465 followers who were provided with 90 posts about local event information, local wildlife activity updates and species-specific information with safety suggestions to stay safe while in wildlife country. Eight print articles with similar content were published reaching 7,611 subscribers.

Garbage Bin Tagging

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection as a reminder to not put garbage outside unsecured until the day of pick-up (Figure 9). During 27 outings between 9:00 pm and midnight, 248 bins were tagged in the Town of Princeton. This number is higher than last year, possibly due to unexpected changes in the curbside garbage pickup schedule, and a need for neighborhoods that received in-person education in 2021 to be reminded to store their garbage inside for 2022 and into the future. After a few tagged bin reminders, neighborhoods reduced early garbage set outs, illustrating the benefit of the program as shown in the graph below (Figure 10). Neighborhoods that had bins tagged multiple times were then followed up with

door-to-door education and had no garbage on the curb set out at night in following weeks. Many businesses continued locking their large bins, however some business still have work to do to manage their wildlife attractants as many of the enclosures built are not as bear-resistant as they could be.

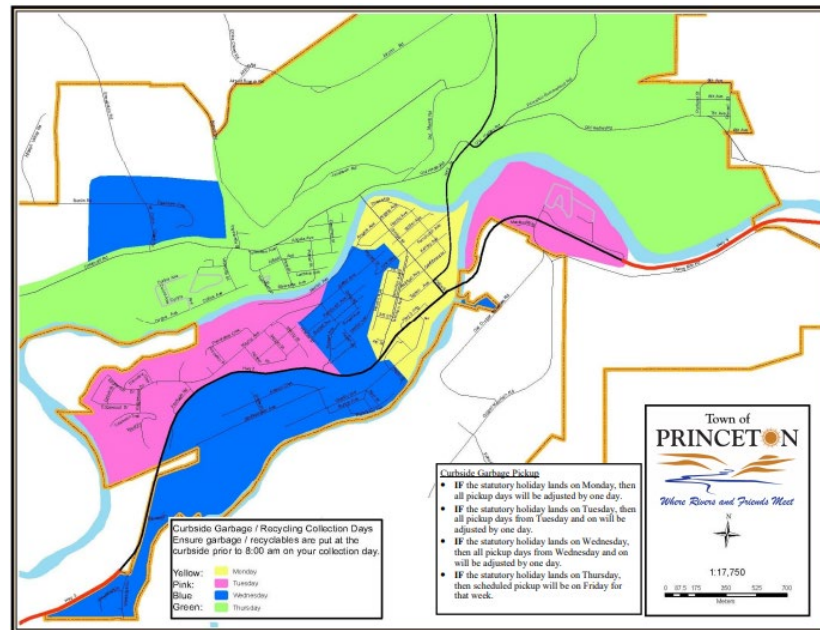


Figure 9. Garbage Collection areas in The Town of Princeton.

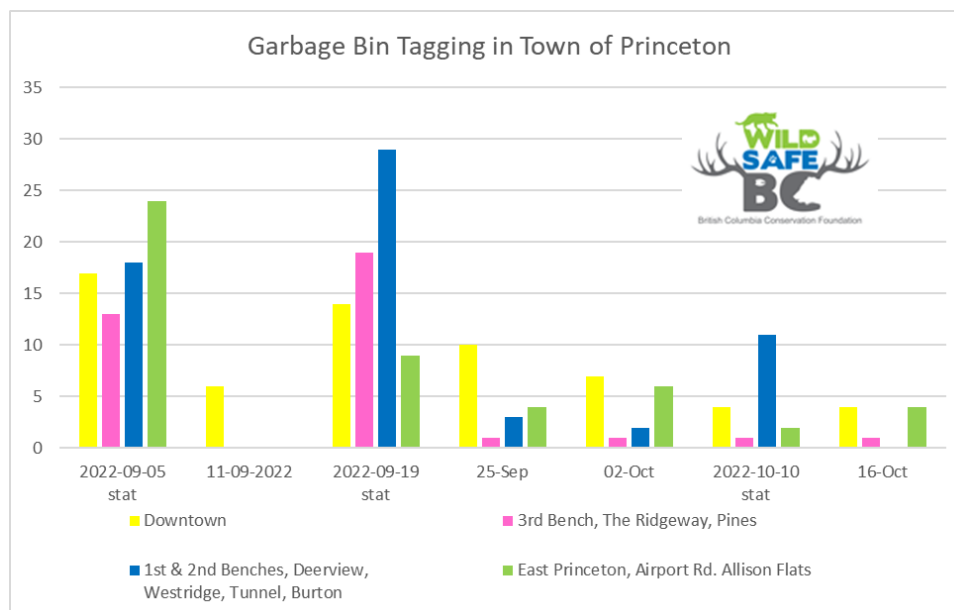


Figure 10. Number of bins tagged in communities around Princeton during 2022 bin-tagging outings.

Wildlife in Area Signs

Bright yellow “Deer in Area”, “Bear in Area” and “Cougar in Area” signs were placed around the community following reported wildlife activity to remind people to be aware of their surroundings, to be prepared to encounter wildlife and to secure their attractants. Wildlife is reported in a variety of ways such as calls and messages passed on by the Town of Princeton, public calls, Facebook posts, and WARP alerts. The areas with many reports of wildlife activity in the Town of Princeton included the wooded area surrounding Princeton General Hospital, the greenspace between the benches and the Tulameen River, Allison Flats across the Coalmont Road up into China Ridge, and the downtown area along Penryn Avenue (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Wildlife in Area signs in the Town of Princeton, 2022.

Collaborations

This year the WCC responded to multiple requests coming directly from the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and the Town of Princeton during the busy month of September and October to educate people about reported bear activity and unsecured wildlife attractants. The WCC visited locations indicated by the COS and the Town and chatted with residents and property managers with the goal of providing positive, actionable attraction management information to address the human-wildlife conflict concerns. Follow-up emails were sent with information about the specific situation(s) and suggested solutions to the resident or property manager, the bylaw officer and the COS.

While out in the community the WCC answered questions about how residents can make their property FireSmart as well as improve their wildlife safety measures around their property. The Town of Princeton offers both programs. These two programs complement each other as the steps to improve wildfire safety like picking up debris, removing underbrush and trimming trees up 2 meters above the ground also limits hiding places and improves line of site to help residents avoid a wildlife encounter.

WildSafeBC Business Pledge

The WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program has been developed to generate public interest, recognize good work, and encourage businesses to be good examples in their community for how to keep the local wildlife wild and their community safe. To take the pledge, a business is reviewed on their solid waste management procedures and infrastructure, the WCC and the

business set up training for staff about securing attractants around the jobsite and wildlife encounter safety. The business also works to share the messaging from WildSafeBC. An added benefit of connecting with workplaces is that employees also take this helpful knowledge home with them. 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. Princeton Outdoor Supply, Fletcher Home Building Center, Whistling Kettle Disk Golf Course, Copper Creek Ranch, Net Zero Waste and Copper Mountain Mine all participated in the program this year (Figure 12). Other businesses in downtown Princeton were informed of this opportunity and will require a revisit next season.



Figure 12. Businesses that participated in the WildSafeBC Business Pledge.

Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS)

The WCC talked to many people in the following communities to bring awareness and solutions about managing wildlife attractants to the more rural areas around Princeton. There are no wildlife attractant or garbage storage bylaw requirements for Area H or G - as per RDOS Bylaw [BL2819.pdf \(rdos.bc.ca\)](https://www.rdos.bc.ca/BL2819.pdf). The hope of the WCC is that residents in these areas continue to find ways to properly secure their attractants to keep wildlife wild and their community safe.

Hedley

East of Princeton, there is a small valley located along Hwy 3 beside the Similkameen River and the community of Hedley. Composed almost entirely of full-time residents, this compact area has an abundance of businesses, fruit trees, fencing and storage sheds. The small properties range from well-kept lawns to overgrown brush with a variety of materials stored. Regular curbside garbage pickup is provided and some homes have wooden boxes on the street to place their garbage in. Residents have started locking these wooden bins as Hedley is experiencing human-wildlife conflict with black bears, raccoons, rats, and rattlesnakes. The WCC presented 3 WildSafe Ranger Presentations and 1 Bear Spray Workshop at the Hedley Library focusing on improving residents' understanding of the connection between attractants

and human-wildlife conflict and becoming more prepared for a wildlife encounter. The workshop garnered interest in electric fencing for securing fruit trees and livestock, and elicited commitments to stop feeding raccoons.

Missezula Lake

North of Princeton, following Hwy 5a and turning off on Summers Creek Road, is the remote community of Missezula Lake. Unlike Hedley, this community has no stores, businesses or garbage pickup. The three streets at the south end of the 8 km long lake are hidden by overgrown brush and evergreen trees and hosts a few full-time residents and several seasonal rental properties. These rental properties are used mostly by people from the city vacationing at the lake. The WCC met with locals and hosted an educational booth at their Annual Pancake Day with a large turnout and lots of interest in further WildSafeBC engagement with the community. Bears had been frequenting the area and vacationers were eager to learn about why bears were being seen close to their cabins and did not realize that bird seed and empty recyclables are attractants. Garbage was a known attractant and many people commented on the inconvenience of the Princeton Landfill being closed on Sunday as a barrier to them moving the trash away from their properties in a shorter time period, a practice that would reduce the attractiveness of the garbage by reducing amount and odors.

Tulameen

East of Princeton, down Coalmont Road, is the well-known community of Tulameen. At the south end of Otter Lake, this popular destination has the Trading Post Store, an annual parade, Family Days Weekend, concerts, beer gardens, boating, outdoor skating rink, Fish and Game Shooting Range and Tulameen Provincial Park. The properties are small and located in the valley bottom. The sides of the valley fill up with additional tents and campers during the summer season. The WCC was invited to set up an educational booth at the Tulameen Fire Hall during the Family Days Weekend. This community often sees bears and cougars in the area and the booth provided an opportunity to share “staying safe in wildlife country” information. The WCC emphasized the message of making sure that children play in groups and do not go off into the forest alone. There is no municipal garbage pickup, but a local resident does offer the service weekly for a fee.

Eastgate

East of Princeton on Hwy 3 and beside Manning Park is the growing area of Eastgate. The community is two long streets on either side of the highway that wind into the forest and have been affected by wildlife from every direction. There is an abundance of saskatoon berry bushes as well as other high value bear habitat very close to homes and cabins. Properties are a mixture of full-time residents, vacation cabins, rentals, and a growing number of private campgrounds. The WCC toured the area and spoke to locals who have noticed bears becoming more of a concern after they succeed in accessing garbage and attractants left out, especially around rental properties. There are also forestry campsites, three large scale composting facilities, and an open pit copper mine located in the forest between Eastgate and Princeton. The Net Zero Waste compost facility was experiencing bear activity and invited the WCC to

provide a Bear Spray Workshop to improve staff safety. They also participated in the WildSafeBC Business Pledge process and received information on how to install electric fencing around the freshly delivered compost with the goal of eventually fencing the entire site.

Challenges and Opportunities

While great improvements have been made it will be necessary to continue to educate the public as reminders are needed to maintain the effort required to consistently manage garbage, fruit trees and other wildlife attractants. In addition, people new to the community are at a higher risk for conflict as they are often unprepared to safely encounter wildlife and are not aware of all the things that attract wildlife into urban developed areas.

To address these issues in the community, the following initiatives are recommended for 2023:

- Continue to work towards Provincial Bear Smart Certification
- Follow up with businesses that postponed participating in the WildSafeBC Business Pledge
- Host a garbage pickup event in areas where bears have been dragging garbage
- Support the Princeton Visitor Center and Municipal campground in providing information to visitors about the disadvantages of feeding wildlife
- Prioritize door-to-door education
- Coordinate a pumpkin pickup event
- Continue upgrading garbage bin infrastructure with bear-resistant ones
- Host Bear Spray Workshops with a focus on Urban Deer
- Engage the public with a social science survey so residents are involved in decisions regarding wildlife and their community
- Review fencing bylaws to evaluate their effectiveness for deer
- Include WildSafeBC Homeowner's Checklist with property tax mail out
- Plan for an increase in solid waste from tourism uptake
- Keep grass and brush consistently short around Off-Leash Dog Park and other popular trails around town
- Create a wildlife reporting recording program for town for reports not involving a risk to public safety

Acknowledgements

The WCC is grateful to all the residents for their respect, open dialogue, and efforts to manage their attractants. A huge thank you to the Princeton Town staff, Mayor and Council, Bylaw Officer, Conservation Officer Service, RDOS, Province of BC and BC Conservation Foundation for supporting the WildSafeBC Princeton and RDOS Area H program and understanding the importance of having an education program to reduce human-wildlife conflict. Thank you for helping to keep the wildlife wild and communities safe.