

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

District of Vanderhoof

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Vanderhoof Program between May 9th and November 30th, 2022. WildSafeBC began its third season in the District of Vanderhoof after the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) Carlie O'Brien completed training in May. Previous seasons were in 2016 and 2018.

The WildSafeBC Vanderhoof program covers the town limits of Vanderhoof along with a portion of Engen in the west (Figure 1). Vanderhoof is within the Omineca region and is the geographic centre of British Columbia. It is located within the Nechako region and is on the banks of the Nechako River. Vanderhoof is situated on the traditional territory of the Saik'uz First Nation.

The WildSafeBC program has been actively working to reduce human-wildlife conflict in BC communities through education, innovation, and cooperation. Vanderhoof has a wide variety of natural and unnatural wildlife attractants that draw wildlife into the community. The Nechako River provides a wildlife corridor through the center of the community and has extensive riparian systems which provide habitat for a variety of species. Additionally, there are also unnatural attractants, such as bird feeders, fruit trees, and garbage. In 2022, there were 86 calls to the Conservation Officer Service regarding wildlife in conflict or sightings in urban settings.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community. Activities included:

- WildSafe Ranger Program presentations reached 44 youth. An additional 65 youth were reached through collaborative display booths.
- 335 people reached through display booths at the Vanderhoof Farmers Market and the BC Goes Wild event.
- 3 bin tagging outings and 140 bins tagged, 91% of the residences whose bins were tagged during an initial survey did not repeat the behaviour.
- 188 people were reached through door-to-door in person and 138 door hangers left.
- The Bare Campsite Program was introduced in the region.
- The WildSafeBC Vanderhoof Facebook page now has 80 followers and has reached 231 people from January 1, 2022 to November 30, 2022.

The program has been well received by the residents of Vanderhoof and moving forward these initiatives and collaborations will help "keep wildlife wild and our communities safe". Highlights from the season included connecting with a wide variety of residents and tourists at the Farmers Market events which allowed for respectful conversations of attractant management.

The key challenges from the season included the restriction of the program to the boundaries of the District of Vanderhoof, as the majority of human-wildlife conflict appears to occur just outside the limits on farmland properties. Proactive attractant management should remain a priority in terms of education efforts.

The WCC would like to thank its sponsors, the District of Vanderhoof, along with the BC Conservation Foundation and the Province of British Columbia.

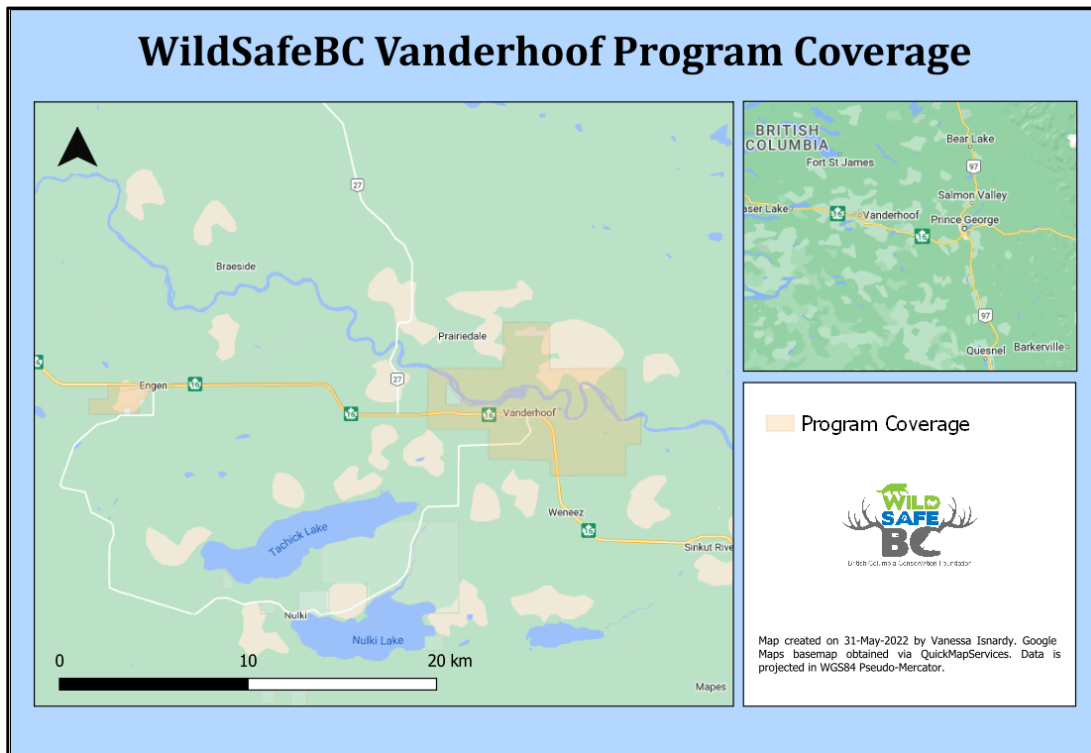


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Vanderhoof program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: Black bear. Photo credit: J. Couperus

Highlights from the 2022 Season

Wildlife Activity

Calls made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) are available to the public through the WildSafeBC Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). This data is updated daily and this report for the District of Vanderhoof includes data from January 1, 2017, to November 26, 2022. In 2022, there has been a total of 86 reports made to the COS for the Vanderhoof area, which is a 22% decrease compared to 2021 with 107 reports. Black bears were the most reported species (38), followed by deer (15), moose (8), grizzly bears (3), and cougars (3) (Figure 2).

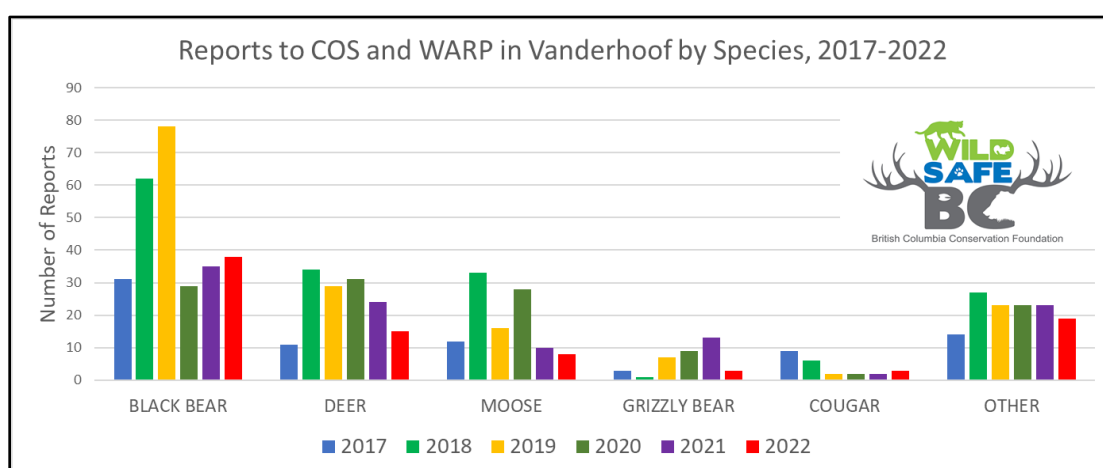


Figure 2. Reports to COS and WARP in the District of Vanderhoof by species from January 1, 2017, to November 26, 2022.

Of the 86 reports this year, black bears made up 44% of the reports. Black bear reports increased by 8% this year from 35 reports in 2021. May was a record month for black bear sightings compared to previous years, likely attributed to a dry spring resulting in reduced natural food availability. Similar to previous years, black bear activity followed a standard pattern of frequency throughout the months, beginning in April, with peaks occurring in August and September as bears enter hyperphagia and become extremely food-motivated to prepare for winter denning (Figure 3).

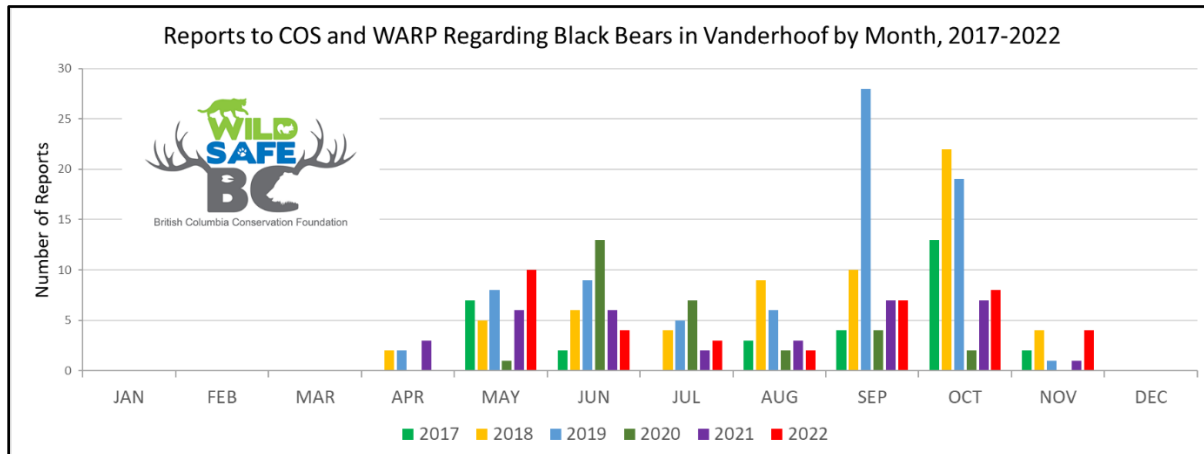


Figure 3. Reports to COS and WARP in the District of Vanderhoof regarding black bears by month from January 1, 2017, to November 26, 2022.

Display Booths and Presentations

The WildSafeBC display booth was set up at the Vanderhoof Farmers Market events this season and was welcomed by both residents and tourists of all ages (Figure 4). Attendees appreciate the opportunity to discuss local wildlife, learn about how to prevent negative encounters with wildlife, how to respond to human-wildlife conflicts and about attractant management. The WCC attended the Farmers Market on 3 separate occasions where a total of 335 people were engaged with the information being shared.

The WCC also collaborated with the Vanderhoof Tourism and Cultural Centre & Community Museum to present to students during their educational tours through the museum. These presentations focused on wildlife in the area and the needs of these species. For this arrangement the WCC provided 3 presentations to a total of 65 students in grades K-3.



Figure 4. Display booth at the Vanderhoof Farmers Market.

WildSafe Rangers Program

The WCC presented WildSafe Ranger Programming (WRP) to 2 grade 6 classes from W.L.McLeod Elementary with a total of 44 attendees, also in collaboration with the Vanderhoof Tourism and Cultural Centre & Community Museum. WRP introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. Students received WildSafe Ranger kits to take home with them following each program session with the intention that these materials will spark a conversation with their families at home about attractant management and the WildSafeBC message of “keep wildlife wild and communities safe”.

Door-to-Door Canvassing and Bin Tagging

Through door-to-door canvassing, a total of 188 people received in-person conversations from the WCC and 138 households were provided with door hangers as there was no one available at the time of the canvassing event for an in-person conversation. Areas near the Nechako were prioritized with this effort due to high levels of wildlife activity.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. During 3 outings, a total of 140 bins were tagged in the District of Vanderhoof across the entire curbside collection area (Figure 5).

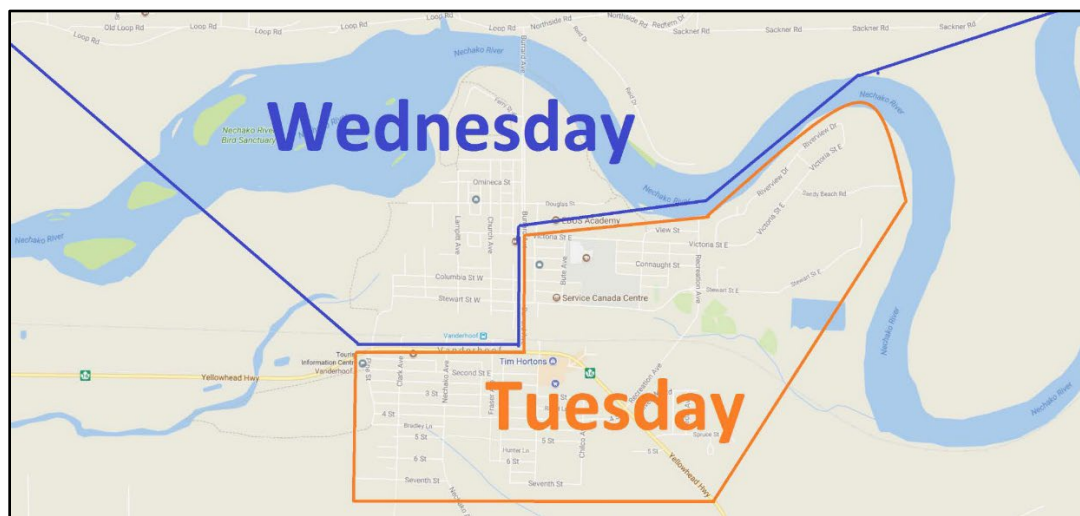


Figure 5. Curbside solid waste collection for the District of Vanderhoof i.e. area that was covered for bin tagging activities. Credit: District of Vanderhoof

Of the 140 bins that were tagged, a total of 11 bins were tagged on two separate occasions. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing human behaviours is demonstrated by the 91% of residents whose bins were tagged during an initial survey and then were not found on the curb again during any of the additional surveys. Zero bins were tagged on all three occasions.

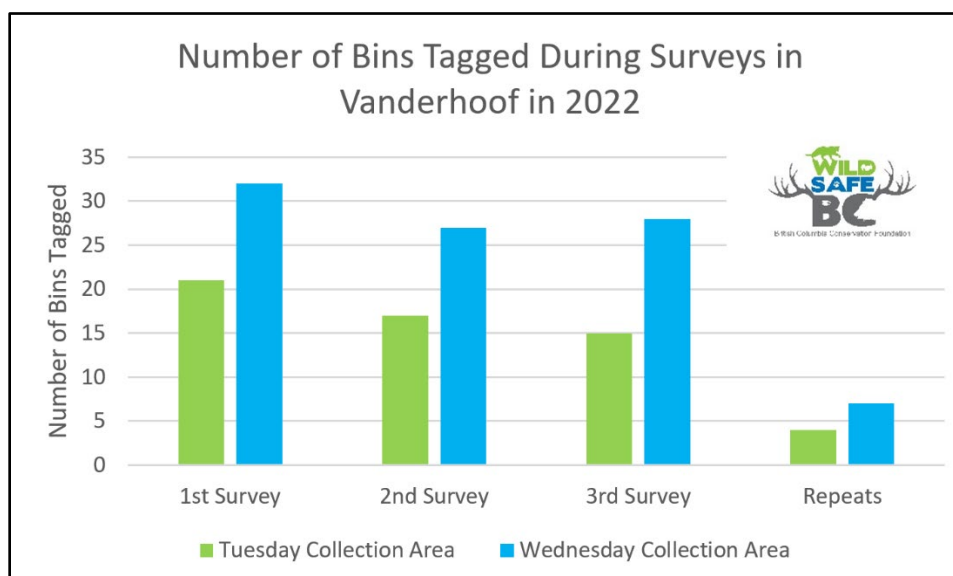


Figure 6. Number of garbage bins tagged that were placed out at the curb the night prior to collection.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Vanderhoof Facebook page increased from 71 followers in 2021 to 80 followers in 2022, an increase of 11%. Popular themes for posts included information of how to manage various attractants on properties to avoid surprise visits from wildlife.

The WildSafeBC Vanderhoof program was supported by local media platforms including the *Vanderhoof Omineca Express*, where an article was published on bin tagging.

Collaboration

The WCC collaborated with the Vanderhoof Tourism and Cultural Centre & Community Museum to deliver programs to school groups during this past season. Additionally, the WCC collaborated with the local Conservation Officer Service to discuss program objectives as both WildSafeBC and the COS have a similar message and work together to change human behaviours to allow for wildlife and people to coexist.

Business Pledge

The WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to act as 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 conflict reduction information. 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. Several businesses were approached about the pledge and showed interest in the program. Future programming should involve working with the Chamber of Commerce to increase the amount of businesses approached.

Bare Campsite Program

Through the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program, WildSafeBC can provide clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. While no campsites are currently participating in the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite program in the coverage area, Riverside Park Campground was approached about participating in the program and have expressed an interest in getting involved in future seasons, particularly in regards to the implementation of proper waste management strategies.

Special Initiatives

"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 in this province. During attendance at the Farmers Market in September, the WCC operated a colouring station for BC Goes Wild. This colouring station provided an opportunity for kids to engage with the WildSafeBC messaging and also to enter their colouring page in a Province-wide WildSafeBC colouring contest by submitting their work to the WildSafeBC website. The contest winner is chosen in December and provided with a prize and recognition by the WildSafeBC Provincial Team.

Challenges and Opportunities

The District of Vanderhoof has numerous unnatural attractants such as garbage that continue to be a source that draws wildlife into residential areas. Several areas, such as those neighbourhoods adjacent to the Nechako, have been identified as hotspots and would benefit from increased education efforts.

In upcoming seasons, the WCC should work on the following initiatives:

- Reach more schools for programming, including Nechako Valley Secondary School
- Assist the District of Vanderhoof in developing bylaws to reduce the availability of garbage to wildlife and work towards implementing bear-resistant garbage bins
- Work with Riverside Park Campground to implement the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program
- Work with the Chamber of Commerce to connect with a greater number of businesses to discuss the Business Pledge
- Connect with businesses directly to offer the opportunity to agree to the WildSafeBC Business Pledge
- Increase social media presence to engage with the community and promote events such as fruit-gleaning efforts and our Farmers' Markets presence

Opportunities available to WildSafeBC Vanderhoof in upcoming seasons include reaching out to local First Nations such as Saik'uz First Nation to engage in understanding strategies for coexisting with wildlife.

Acknowledgments

The WCC for the WildSafeBC Vanderhoof program would like to thank the District of Vanderhoof, the Province of British Columbia, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF) for funding this year's program and activities. Special thanks to Heidi Goncalves and Tracey McBride of the District of Vanderhoof and the BCCF team for their support.

The WCC would also like to thank all of the residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties and learn more about our local wild species and ecosystems. The WCC is looking forward to continuing this important work in the next season. Let's continue our work to "keep wildlife wild and our community safe".