

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

łichuuł Hitaću-Macoah

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC ʕichuuł Hitaću-Macoah program between June 13th and November 30th, 2022. The program area of coverage is located on the west coast of Vancouver Island, more specifically on parts of the Haḥuulii (traditional territories) and Treaty Settlement Lands of the Yuuluʔiʔath Government - Ucluelet First Nation and Toquaht Nation (Figure 1). The program serves communities and businesses located in this specific area, with a focus on treaty settlement lands of both Nations and the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District Area C such as the communities of Hitaću, Macoah, Millstream, Port Albion, Salmon Beach, and the Tofino-Ucluelet Junction.

Wildlife activity has been high in most parts of the region throughout the season based on personal communications, social media posts, and reports to the Nation Governments. However, for residents living in the project coverage area, there have been significantly lower reports of conflict with wildlife than in neighbouring communities of Ucluelet and Tofino. Reports to the Conservation Officer Service's 24/7 Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) line showed that black bear interactions have slightly increased from 2021, but are still higher than the previous five-year average. It is important to note that this represents only a fraction of wildlife sightings or conflicts since a small number of events are communicated to the RAPP line each year. No cougar conflicts or wolf sightings were reported to the COS this year.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife, promoting coexistence with the local fauna and strengthening aspects of public safety within each community. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the season.

- The WCC engaged with four summer students from the Yuuluʔiʔath Government Lands and Resources Department to create a short film project about respecting wildlife.
- The WCC teamed up with the WCCs in the Pacific Rim program and held 5 display booths that reached 771 people.
- The WCC meaningfully participated in community dialogue as a member of 6 local committees, building strong relationships with local Nuuchahnulth community members, as well as staff from Parks Canada, and BC Parks.
- The WCC supported the ACRD in their roll-out for the new waste collection bin program in Hitaću in November 2022.
- 8 Facebook posts were created and the local page followers increased from 120 to 143.
- The WCC has reached out to 5 campgrounds in the program area to offer support, materials, and guidance on their operations using the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite resources.

Thank you to the generous support and continuous collaboration of the Yuuluʔiʔath Government-Ucluelet First Nation, the Toquaht Nation, the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District,

the WildSafeBC Pacific Rim program, the Province of British Columbia, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Opportunities for next season include building a larger volunteer base within each community, prioritizing education and outreach in the communities in order to support the transition to new waste management practices, and continue building relationships with community members in order to develop programming that meets their needs and integrates their insights into human-wildlife coexistence practices. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our communities safe”.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC ʕichuuł Hitaču-Macoah program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: Four summer students from the Yuuluʔiłʔath Government Lands and Resources Department interview one another as part of a WildSafeBC video project.

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 WildSafeBC ʕichuuł Hitaču-Macoah program coverage area includes data from January 1, 2017 to November 30, 2022 (Figure 2). This season, there were 23 black bear reports which is higher than the five-year average of 16, and the highest number since the start of our program in 2016. No cougars or wolves were reported to the RAPP line this year.

This year has been a particularly challenging year in regards to high wildlife activity on the West Coast Region, however, it was noted that communities in the program coverage area appeared to have fewer reports of bear sightings in their neighbourhoods. This appears to be a result of increased community awareness and additional measures taken to ensure attractants were well managed. It is important to note that this represents only the reports made to the COS and that many interactions with wildlife go unreported because of a hesitation to call the RAPP line. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) has been working on building messaging to reinforce the importance of calling the COS early to enable them to act before the animal has become food conditioned and human habituated. Reporting early can help inform WildSafeBC education and outreach activities relating to the attractant that might have lured in the animal in the first place. Removing the attractant at the source or securing it with bear-resistant products or electric fencing can encourage the animal to return to feeding on natural food sources.

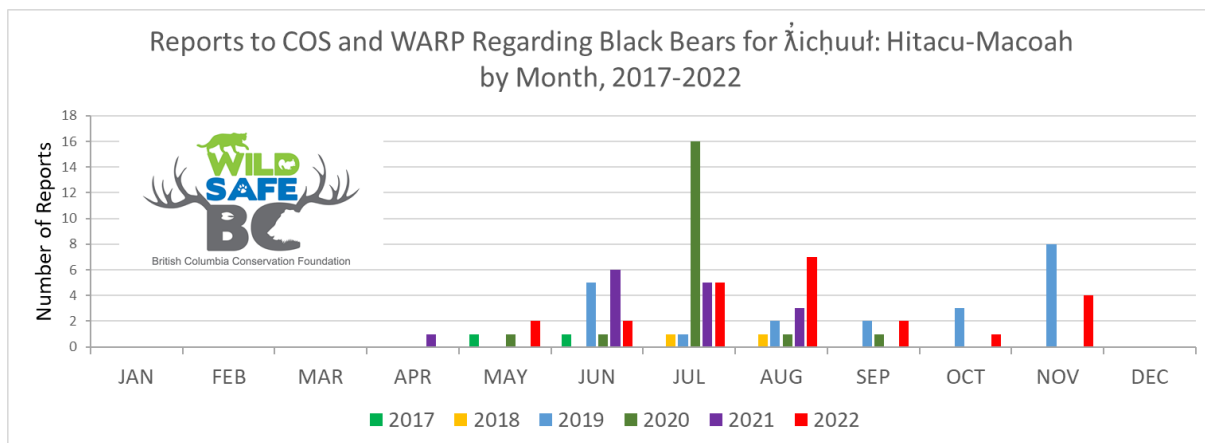


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2017, to November 30, 2022.

Calls made to the RAPP line this year have been exclusively for black bears. Black bear reports started in May and have been spread out over the season, however, there was a defined peak in July and August with a total of 12 reports during these two months representing 52% of total reports for the season (Figure 2). Summer black bear reports came especially from Salmon Beach and Surf Junction, highlighting the importance of collaborating with campgrounds in the

program area. After a quiet autumn, there was another peak of reports in November in Hitaću regarding one bear getting into community members’ new residential bins. The bins were delivered only two weeks prior to these reports and as they were not yet secured, a bear exposed the importance of chaining residential bins or storing them inside, away from wildlife access.

This year, a high number of reports in the West Coast Region (both Pacific Rim and ʕichuuł Hitaću-Macoah program areas) were about bears getting into vehicles, sheds, and other structures. Eight black bears were destroyed this year in the region and many are a result of continuous access to unsecured attractants. While only a small number of black bear conflicts occurred within the ʕichuuł Hitaću-Macoah program area, many of these bears regularly travel from one community to another. This illustrates the importance of a close collaboration between both programs since poor attractant management in one area will often have repercussions in surrounding communities.

Collaborations

The many collaborations throughout the season have been a great way to increase the visibility of the program, engage with a wide range of people, and deepen trust and longevity within the greater community. The WCC meaningfully participated in six regional wildlife committees through gatherings, webinars, and workshops with over 105 participants (Table 1, Figure 3).

Table 1. Committees attended by the WCC in 2022.

Organization	Topic	Number of people
Iisaak Sin Hay Tiic?mis	(Respect all Life) West Coast Vancouver Island Coexistence Network to help humans and wildlife coexist	52+
Bear Stewardship Committee	CBT AGM - Reporting on WildSafeBC activities	16
Iisaak Sin Hay Tiic?mis Subgroup	Interactions between wildlife and filmmakers/photographers	10
Westcoast Indigenous-led Stewardship Corridor	Connecting land management initiatives across western Vancouver Island	20
Toquaht Nation Youth Carving Workshop	Dennis Hetu led workshops to connect with youth around carving	9
ACRD Sort’n’Go Roll-Out	New waste management program being introduced to Hitaću	40

The WCC has been able to take part in the ACRD Sort’nGo rollout which includes community engagement and waste management consultations around introducing the new organics diversion program to Hitaću this October, 2022. It continues to be important for the WCC to be part of these conversations and stay informed as well as to discuss challenges waste management practices can bring up for human-wildlife coexistence in the region.

Other collaborations were with the Conservation Officer Service, the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, Margo Supplies, Ozzard Environmental, Wild Pacific Trail, and the Association of Wetlands Stewards for Clayoquot and Barkley Sounds.



Figure 3. Left: Dennis Hetu of Toquaht Nation with one of his carvings. Right: Coastal wolf, the focus of one of the regional working groups. (Photo Credit: Sam Rose Phillips).

Display Booths

The WCC hosted a total of four outdoor booths reaching over 771 people (Table 2, Figure 4). Many of these booths were a collaboration between the WildSafeBC ʕichuuł Hitaću-Macoah and the WildSafeBC Pacific Rim programs to give both programs more exposure and an extended reach within our adjacent coverage areas. Booth setups allow for residents and visitors to engage with WildSafeBC materials, ask questions and discuss solutions with the WCC related to human-wildlife coexistence.

Table 2. Booths hosted by the WCC during the 2022 season.

Location	Date	Number of people
Recruitment Fair in Hitaću (Bob and Marianne)	June 20 th	30
Ukee Days	July 23 rd -24 th	241
Amphitrite Lighthouse – BC GOES WILD	September 16 th	167
Tofino Market – BC GOES WILD	September 17 th	363



Figure 4. Left: Wild Pacific Trail booth during BC Goes Wild. Right: Booth at Ukee Days in collaboration with the Pacific Rim WCC.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC ʕichuuł Hitaću-Macoah Program Facebook page grew in 2022 from 120 to 148 page followers and a total of 8 original posts were made to promote human-wildlife coexistence. These included posts about attractants, bears getting into vehicles, BC Goes Wild event, and a short video featuring Dennis Hetu. The WCC submitted one news article to the *Umacuk and YG Newsletter* about the youth video project and seasonal wildlife activity (Table 3).

Table 3. Media articles and phone interviews conducted by the WCC during the 2022 season.

Media	Topic	Hyperlink
Umacuk	End of the 2022 season and youth video project	<i>Still to come in Spring of 2023</i>

Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife in Area signs were used in specific areas that were known to have a high amount of bear activity and were known to have potential attractants left unsecured. This strategy for sign placement had the dual purpose of alerting the community to ensure they were aware of the presence of black bears within the community and also trying to encourage safe attractant management in these areas (Figure 5).

Signs were also given to local campgrounds to help provide users with timely information about wildlife sightings in the area. For many communities, campgrounds and wildlife activity hotspots, permanent Wildlife in Area signs could be used and could help keep people away from areas that provide essential corridors for animals to use to pass between areas within their home range.



Figure 5. A Wildlife in Area sign was used to inform residents of black bear activity in this area.

WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

Through the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program, WildSafeBC is able to provide clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. There are two campgrounds that are participating in the Bare Campsite Program and two additional campgrounds were approached about this WildSafeBC initiative.

The WildSafeBC ʕichuuł Hitaću-Macoah program would like to recognize the efforts made by the Wya Point campground and the Secret Beach campground in their commitment to reducing conflict with wildlife and enhancing their guests' safety by keeping attractants secure, having well-maintained bear-resistant infrastructure available for their campers and for being dedicated throughout their operations to keeping wildlife wild.

Special Initiatives

Yuuluʔiiʔath Youth Video Project

The WCC collaborated with Yuuluʔiiʔath summer students in the creation of an 11 minute short film about living respectfully with wildlife within Yuuluʔiiʔath and Toquaht territories. The WCC recorded and edited the film, teaching the students filming skills along the way, while the students conducted interviews with eight Elders and community members. The content reflects Nuu-chah-nulth ways of knowing, with a focus on living in harmony with wildlife. With an intent to listen and understand how the participants feel about wildlife, we inquired about the challenges and ways forward in their communities, as they see it. The youth also gathered footage from community trail cameras that reveals how wildlife share these lands and communities.

Our project goals were to create a student-led short film to be shared within the local community, engage with Hitaću-Macoah community members around the topic of living with wildlife, encourage community members to help keep wildlife wild and their communities safe, and provide opportunities for youth to become leaders in their community.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Brenda Jack, Bernice Touchie, Tyson Touchie Sr., Lindsay McCarthy Sr., Vi Mundy, Bob Mundy, Dennis Hetu, Jeneva Touchie, and James Walton for their shared stories and perspectives while being interviewed by the students.

Evan Touchie, Jada Touchie, Jaysen Touchie, and Calianna McCarthy were the highlight of the WCC's 2022 programming (Figure 6). Their impressive curiosity and care as collaborators and interviewers guided the entire project. Participants expressed their gratitude to have youth engaged with Elders for this meaningful conversation, and shared that this inquiry will surely lead to the community coming together to work towards solutions.



Figure 6. Summer students interview one of our film project's participants in Hitaću (from left to right: Evan Touchie, Jaysen Touchie, Jada Touchie, and Calianna McCarthy).

Bear Stewardship Committee

A Bear Hazard Assessment (BHA) was completed by the Pacific Rim WCC along with the help of many experts to have a better understanding of specific challenges experienced within each community in the region and identify ways to further prevent conflict with black bears in the region. With the information gathered in this report, the Pacific Rim WCC facilitates a Bear Stewardship Committee which the ʕichuuł Hitaću-Macoah WCC participates in to discuss the challenges highlighted in the BHA and work towards a more detailed Bear-Conflict Management Plan for the region. These bi-monthly meetings with multiple partners, stakeholders and experts give the opportunity to each member to put forward ideas and address specific challenges regarding human-bear coexistence in the region. Collaboration across program areas and with a variety of stakeholders promotes togetherness around messaging and approaches to problem-solving.

Community garden electric fencing

The electric fence around the ʕulcamis community garden in Macoah has been a collaboration between the WildSafeBC ʕichuuł Hitaću-Macoah program, the WildSafeBC Pacific Rim program and the Toquaht Nation Government. This initiative would not have been possible without the subsidy funds provided by the ACRD, Margo supplies, David Johnsen (Director of Lands and Public Works and Resources), Brett Freake (Manager of Lands and Resources) and Burton Mack (Public works). The community garden had been an attractant for wildlife in the past and had been damaged by a black bear trying to access it. The garden is surrounded by great wildlife habitat and backs onto the forest and is also near many well-used wildlife corridors. This area was identified as a potential hotspot in the BHA and the solution proposed was electric fencing. With the continued maintenance of this electric fence, the community continues to feel confident that their crops and compost won't be an attractant for the local bears.

BC Goes Wild Weekend

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 the highest in this Province. Throughout the second week of September, the WCC teamed up with the Pacific Rim WCC to host two booths in both Ucluelet and Tofino (Figure 7). During that weekend, the WCC's were joined by Dennis Hetu (Administrator of Lands, Public Works and Resources for Toquaht Nation). A total of 530 people participated in the event.



Figure 7. BC Goes Wild weekend celebrating wildlife with display booths.

Challenges and Opportunities

Beginning the 2022 season at the end of June was a challenge for the WCC in terms of starting after the typical season startup in May. The combination of shorter programming time and getting up to speed on the diverse relationships and needs of the region led to a shift in focus. Instead of prioritizing cornerstone WildSafeBC programming such as presentations and door-to-door canvassing in 2022, the WCC worked with sponsors to move forward on multiple program objectives through the youth video project. This project allowed for a combination of listening to community members, encouraging dialogue around wildlife coexistence, engaging with youth and potential future program coordinators, as well as providing educational programming throughout the making and sharing of the resulting short film.

In 2022, interactions between humans and wildlife in the region were the lowest in Hitaču and Macoah compared to neighbouring communities. With significant bear activity happening at the peak of the season in Salmon Beach and at Secret Beach Campground, there is an opportunity to share knowledge across communities as the fact that wildlife make use of the entire region was being brought to the attention of community users and residents. Dennis Hetu brought his approach to keeping bears out of Macoah to Secret Beach at the height of a bear growing increasingly food-conditioned with campers. As the COS waited to bring a bear trap to the area, Dennis trained the campground staff on his hazing techniques. The staff were successful in de-escalating the situation and the COS did not bring the trap to the campground. This is an approach that can be applied to other situations in order to build a culture of sharing strategies and ideas across communities. This approach highlighted Nuuchahnulth ways of knowing and approaches to living respectfully with wildlife in their traditional territories.

Garbage continues to be a strong attractant in each of the communities as it is drawing wildlife into residential areas. Having different waste management options available in each jurisdiction is a challenge when it comes to education strategies since it is essential to take into consideration each area's specific needs. Some areas also offer waste management services to the community but these services are not adequate for all residents because of physical barriers. There is a need to address these challenges and find a way to offer accessible services to residents. This could be achieved with community volunteers and possibly become a part-time employment opportunity. Also, with the new organics diversion roll-out in the ACRD this fall, it will be important to prioritize messaging on proper household and commercial waste management strategies going forward, and as the communities adjust to this new practice. Creating uniform bylaws and regulations across jurisdictions would greatly support educational messages and would provide the opportunity for additional enforcement to be in place for those residents not responsive to education alone.

Working collaboratively with communities in the program region to be sure their needs are being met is essential to the WildSafeBC ʕichuuł Hitaću-Macoah program. Insights and input from our partners are implemented in the program work being done, as well as in strategic planning moving forward. To address the issue of wildlife accessing unsecured garbage on a regular basis within local neighbourhoods, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2023:

- Building a larger volunteer base within each community.
- Reevaluate efficacy of door-to-door campaigns for each neighbourhood.
- With the ACRD Sort'nGo Roll-Out being implemented at the tail end of 2022 programming, prioritize education and outreach in the community in order to support the transition to new waste management practices.
- Keep discussing solutions with the Bear Stewardship Committee.
- Continue working on education campaigns focusing on wildlife attractant hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops all of which should meet the needs of the community being served.
- Work with local businesses to sign the WildSafeBC Business Pledge and encourage and support campgrounds to take part in the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.
- Actively promote ways that the program can support residents in keeping wildlife wild and their community safe by ensuring members are aware of optimal waste management practices in wildlife country.
- Support better solid waste management strategies in the region to reduce access by wildlife.

Next year, the WCC hopes to be able to continue building relationships with community members, developing programming that meets their needs, and integrating their insights into human-wildlife coexistence practices.

Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC ʕichuuł Hitaću-Macoah Program would not have been possible without the generous funding contributions from the Yuułuʔiʔath Government-Ucluelet First Nation, the Toquaht Nation, the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, the Province of British Columbia, and the BC Conservation Foundation.

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