

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2022

Selkirk Purcell

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell Program between June 1 and November 30, 2022. The Selkirk Purcell area includes the Town of Creston, the Village of Salmo, the Lower Kootenay Band of the Ktunaxa First Nation, the Regional District of the Central Kootenay (RDCK) Areas A, B, C and G and the communities of Erickson, West Creston, Kootenay Bay, Riondel, Crawford Bay, Gray Creek, Boswell, Kuskanook, Wynndel, Canyon-Lister, Rykerts, Kitchener, Yahk, Kingsgate, Ymir and Nelway (Figure 1). The area includes two borders with Alberta and the United States, five provincial parks, and the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, which is a UNESCO world heritage wildlife management area. The WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell area operates on the traditional lands of the Ktunaxa, Sinixt and Syilx Peoples.

During the 2022 season, the majority of reported human-wildlife interactions involved black bears. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed education outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community, emphasizing bear safety. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the season:

- 7 WildSafe Ranger Presentations (WRP) and 81 youth reached
- 2 Wildlife Safety and Awareness presentations provided to a total of 40 participants
- 297 households received educational door hangers
- 171 people reached through 8 display booths
- 170+ Facebook posts, and 24 new followers to the Selkirk Purcell Facebook page from January 1, 2022 to November 30, 2022
- 7 businesses were approached about the WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program

Some of the challenges this season included unexpected weather events and smoke events that affected delivery, attendance, and frequency of some outreach initiatives. Additionally, the vast and predominately rural coverage zone of the Selkirk Purcell program posed challenges in reaching many of the communities and residents in the region. Many residents of the Selkirk Purcell area have a neutral attitude towards wildlife safety and managing their attractants, which affected some wildlife safety education efforts.

WildSafeBC would like to thank the sponsors that made this season possible: the Town of Creston, the Province of British Columbia, the BC Conservation Foundation, the Regional District of Central Kootenay and the Columbia Basin Trust.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: The WCC booth at the Salmo Farmers' Market in the 2022 season.

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 Selkirk Purcell area includes data from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

There were 103 black bear reports, which is higher than the five-year average of 74 (Figure 2). The increase in reports in the fall months of September and October follows expected seasonal trends as bears enter a period of extreme eating called hyperphagia, to prepare for winter denning. Likewise, the increase in reports in May and June may correspond with bears leaving their hibernation dens and searching for food in the spring (Figure 3).

Cougar reports (7), deer reports (33), and grizzly bear reports (2), were all lower than the five-year average this year. Elk reports (10) were close to average this year. However, 2022 saw the fewest number of reports for all wildlife species to the COS and WARP in the last five years (Figure 2).

Unfortunately, data regarding wildlife attractant type was unavailable this year. Based on the WCC’s discussions with the Conservation Officer for the area and Selkirk Purcell residents, it is likely that a most attractants this season were unnatural food sources (e.g. unsecured garbage and fruit trees).

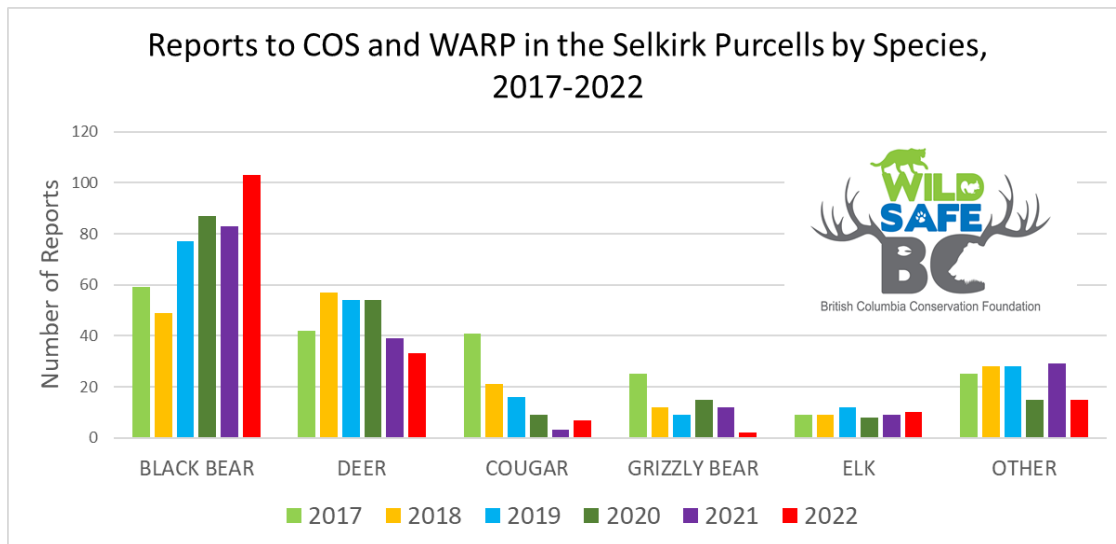


Figure 2. Year-to-year reports for all wildlife species from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022 in the Selkirk Purcell area.

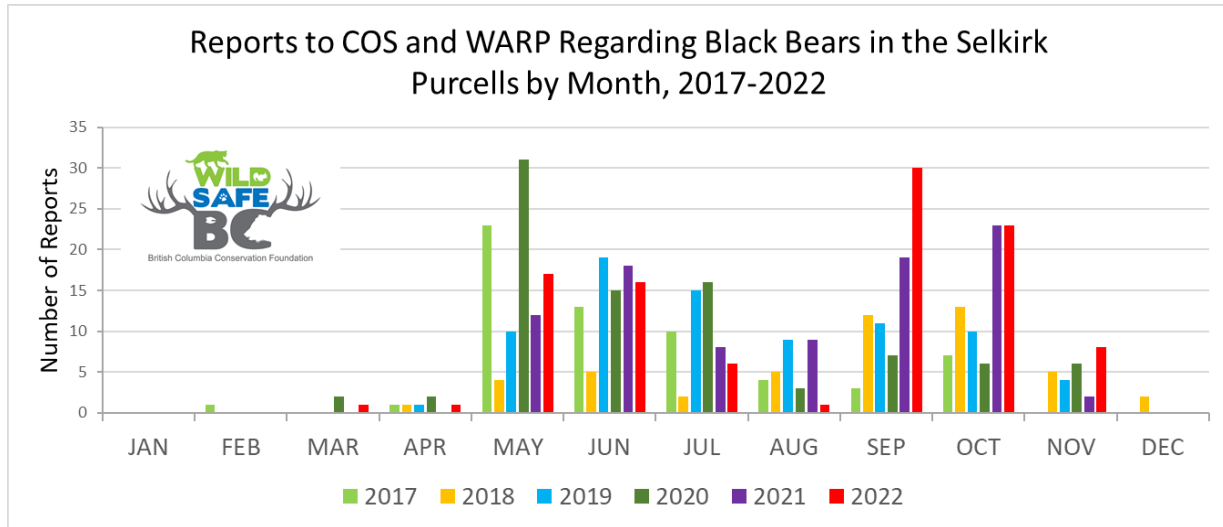


Figure 3. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP in the Selkirk Purcells from January 1, 2017 to November 26, 2022.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of three schools and one camp participated in the WRP. There were 81 students that became WildSafe Rangers and received kits to take home which included an activity booklet (Table 1). The activities are designed to encourage further discussion about wildlife awareness and attractant management with their families.

Table 1. Schools and camps that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2022.

School or Camp	Grade	Students
Salmo Valley Library Reading Club	K-7 (2 classes)	20
Salmo Elementary	2-3 (1 class)	16
Yaqaan Nukiy Elementary	K-8 (3 classes)	45

Presentations to Community Groups

WildSafeBC presentations were focused on local Wildlife Awareness and Safety topics combined with effective and safe use of bear spray. The WCC gave two presentations to a total of 40 participants:

- Full length (1.5 hours) Wildlife Safety and Awareness Presentation at Moyie River Ranch Resort with 16 participants.
- Shortened (30 minute) Wildlife Safety and Awareness Presentation at Wild North Brewing Co. before Bears ‘n Brews Trivia Event (in collaboration with Nelson/Kaslo WCC and Castlegar WCC for BC Goes Wild Event) with 24 participants (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The WCC reading trivia questions after Wildlife Safety and Awareness Presentation at Wild North Brewing Co. in Creston.

Display Booths

Display booths were found to be one of the most effective ways to engage with residents of the Selkirk Purcell coverage zone. The WCC held seven display booths in Salmo, Creston, and Crawford Bay, connecting with a total of 171 residents through these booths (Table 2). Many of the residents provided positive feedback on the interaction and information provided at these events (Figure 5).

Table 2. Display booths attended and people reached in 2022 season.

Display Booth	Times attended	People reached
Creston Valley Farmers Market	1	71
Salmo Farmers Market	3	65
Red's Bakery	1	16
Salmo Ski Hill Enduro Bike Race	1	16
Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Centre	1	3



Figure 5. Display booth with WildSafe Ranger Coloring Contest supplies at the Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Centre in Creston (left). Booth setup at the Salmo Ski Hill Bike Race event (right).

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education reached almost 300 Selkirk Purcell residents. During these campaigns, the WCC engaged in about 25 in-person conversations with residents. Door-to-door education efforts were concentrated in areas of Creston adjacent to green spaces since wildlife frequent those areas, often using them as corridors to move between areas in their home range. A door-to-door education session was also held in Salmo after the local CO requested a visit due to increasing reports of fruit trees attracting black bears to residential areas.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers that are set on the curbside the day before collection. Bin tagging was not done in Creston this season by request of the Town of Creston. This is because the Town of Creston launched a compost collection system and did not want to overwhelm residents. Many of the areas within the Selkirk Purcell coverage zone do not have a waste collection system, and instead residents bring their waste to a local transfer station. The WCC reached out to the appropriate transfer stations asking permission to set up a booth there in order to educate residents on garbage as a wildlife attractant in lieu of bin tagging, but the transfer stations never responded with permission to setup the booth. This effort should be continued next season as this effort has the potential to make a large impact on changing behaviours in the community.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Selkirk Purcell Facebook page grew 14.6% in 2022 from 443 to 508 followers. The WCC added over 170 posts to the page, which were then shared to other local community pages. Through consistent posting, 1,756 people were reached via Facebook posts. This helped spread WildSafeBC messaging on attractant management and safety awareness in the area.

The WCC submitted two news articles to the *Creston Valley Advance* and *Let's Talk Creston*. The topics included announcing upcoming bear spray workshops, how to continue avoiding human-wildlife conflict throughout the fall season, and encouraging residents to manage their fruit trees.

Collaborations

The WCC worked with the Nelson/Kaslo WCC, Castlegar WCC, Angry Hen Brewing Co. in Kaslo and Wild North Brewing Co. in Creston, to host Bears 'n Brews Trivia Nights as a part of the BC Goes Wild Event in the month of September.

The WCC also wrote media articles and Facebook posts to publicize and promote the Creston Valley Food Action Coalition's fruit gleaning program, Harvest Share.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The Lower Kootenay Band of the Ktunaxa First Nation, locally known as Yaqan nu?kiy were the original inhabitants of the Lower Kootenay area. WCCs within the Columbia Basin Trust Region worked together to reach out to First Nations groups to bring Indigenous perspectives into the WildSafeBC programming and collaborate to find effective ways to support their communities with human-wildlife conflict reduction. We hope this collaboration can develop further in future seasons.

Challenges and Opportunities

The Selkirk Purcell coverage zone is large and contains a unique mix of communities, with most of them being relatively rural. The vast area that the Selkirk Purcell zone covers posed some challenges in ensuring that WildSafeBC messaging, education, and events could reach as many residents and communities as possible. More specifically, the East Kootenay Lake area (Crawford Bay, Riondel, Wynndel) is a hotspot for bear conflict, yet historically these communities have not had as much access to WildSafeBC programming. As a result, future Selkirk Purcell WCCs should aim to increase outreach efforts in those communities.

Additionally, a notable number of residents within the Selkirk Purcell coverage zone do not connect with WildSafeBC social media accounts, which affected resident participation in some WildSafeBC programming conducted or promoted via social media. Future Selkirk Purcell WCCs should consider promoting their events and outreach in local news sources, like newspapers and local community event boards.

The wildlife most likely to be spotted and in conflict with humans in the Selkirk Purcell coverage zone are black bears. This is largely due to many Selkirk Purcell communities being located directly adjacent to green spaces that are home to local wildlife. This indicates that education on managing residential attractants should continue to be a priority in next year's programming, particularly with an emphasis on managing garbage and fruit trees as main attractants.

Through engagement with residents via display booths, it is evident that many residents own, carry, and recognize the importance of bear spray, but do not feel confident in using it. This, in conjunction to the close proximity of many wildlife habitats near residents' homes, indicates that more messaging and workshops on how to effectively and safely use bear spray would be beneficial for future WildSafeBC outreach in the Selkirk Purcell area. Two bear spray workshops were organized during the 2022 season, but both were cancelled due to low registration numbers.

In summary, opportunities to address in 2023 include:

- Continue education on attractant management and wildlife safety through door-to-door outreach, presentations, display booths, social media, and the press
- Increase WildSafeBC event promotion and outreach outside of social media (e.g. event boards, local hiking groups, newspaper, etc.)
- Increase the knowledge and comfort with using bear spray through hosting bear spray workshops
- Increase outreach in East Kootenay Lake communities (Crawford Bay, Riondel, and Wynndel)
- Offer bin-tagging service in Creston in 2023

Acknowledgements

The Selkirk-Purcell WildSafeBC Program would like to acknowledge the generous support it receives from its sponsors including the Province of British Columbia, the Columbia Basin Trust, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the Town of Creston.

The WCC values the invaluable support provided by Conservation Officer Blake Day and the staff at the Town of Creston, including Joel Comer, Mike Moore and Brandy Dyer. We thank the following schools and clubs for their commitment to the WildSafe Ranger education program: Adam Robertson Elementary, Yaqan Nukiy Elementary School, the Salmo Valley Library Reading Club, and Salmo Elementary. A special thanks to Carla Ahern of the Kootenay-Columbia Discovery Center for allowing us to host WildSafeBC events and display booths at the Center. We would also like to thank the Salmo Valley Farmers Market and the Creston Valley Farmers Market for their support in hosting WildSafeBC display booths throughout the season.

Finally, thank you to the *Creston Valley Advance* Newspaper and *Let's Talk Creston* for promoting our WildSafeBC messaging to the community at large and helping to deliver safety information to a wider audience.