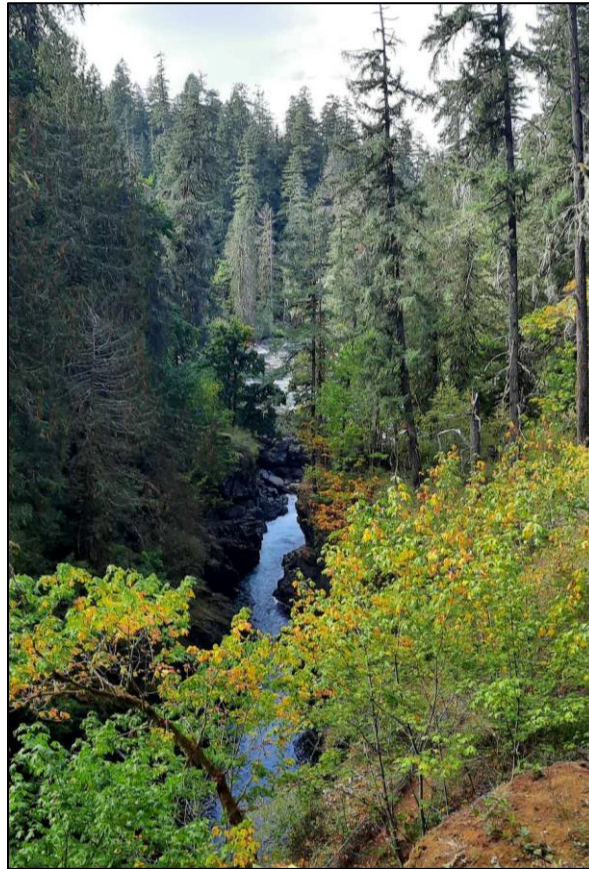


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

Alberni Valley

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Coordinator



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Program between May 15th and November 30th 2023. The program covers the City of Port Alberni and the surrounding Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) electoral areas of Sproat Lake, Cherry Creek, Beaver Creek and Beaufort which reside on the traditional territory of the Hupačasath and Tseshaht First Nations (Figure 1).

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activity with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the season:

- 17 WildSafe Ranger Program presentations and 691 youth reached.
- 4 presentations given to community groups and 44 participants.
- 35 people reached through door-to-door in person and 19 door hangers left.
- 11 display booths and 1,052 people reached.
- 3 Facebook posts (excluding posts shared from Provincial page) and 42 new Facebook page followers from January 1 to November 30, 2023.

In total, the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program was successful in reaching over 1800 individuals through face-to-face conversations that lead to opportunities to deliver WildSafeBC messaging. In the context of the 8th Annual BC Goes Wild, the WCC participated in the Alberni Valley Rivers Day in collaboration with WildSafeBC Pacific Rim, BC Parks, local First Nations and other local groups. The WCC also supported a local fruit-gleaning initiative, The Gleaning Project, by sharing information about the program with residents.

A huge challenge for the Alberni Valley was the wildfire that crossed Highway 4 making access to the Alberni Valley more difficult. The situation was well managed by the organizations in charge, but the WCC lived outside the area with limited access throughout the season. The community would benefit from Bin tagging and WildSafe Business Pledge next year since these programs were not worked on this year.

WildSafeBC would like to thank its generous sponsors, including the Province of British Columbia, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the ACRD, for making the program possible. WildSafeBC also thanks local staff, organizations, and community residents for their continued support of the program.

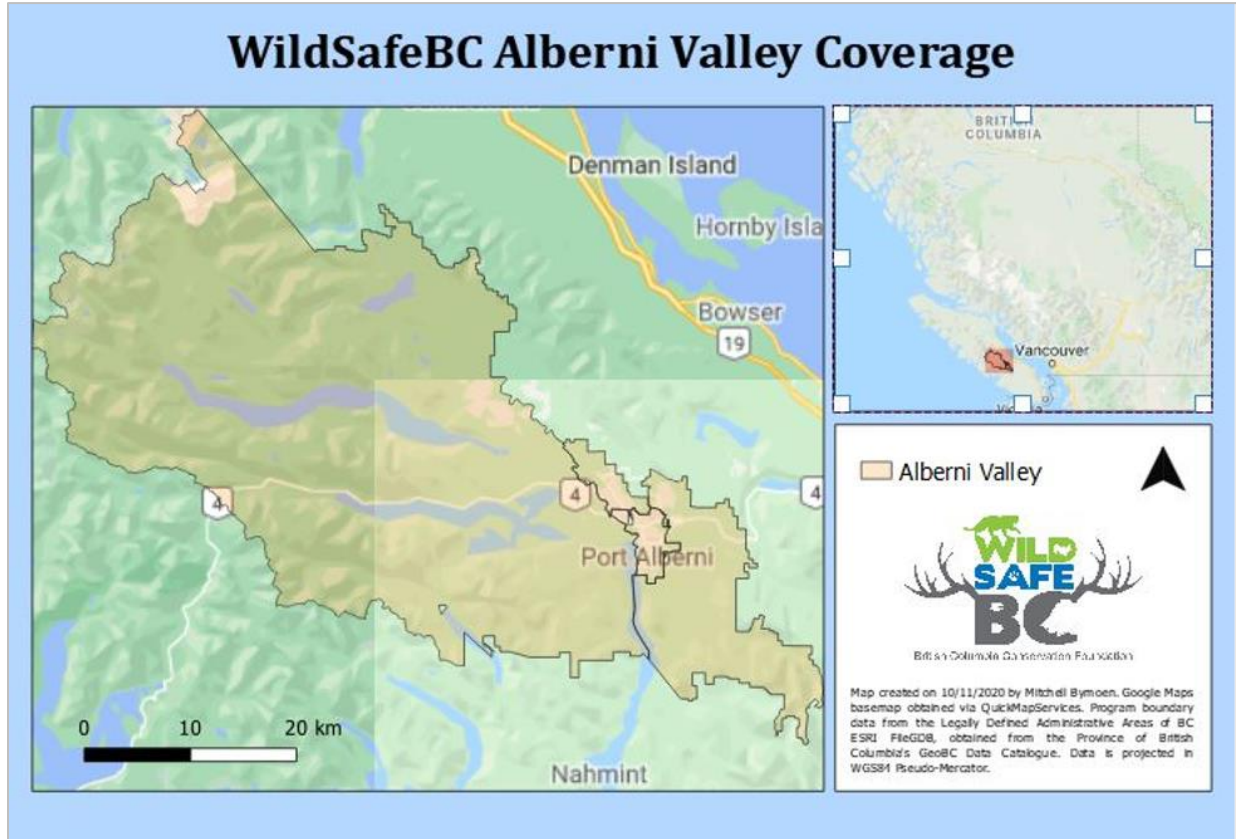


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: Stamp River Provincial Park

Highlights from the 2023 Season

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict, including causes and prevention. A total of 5 schools participated in the WRP with over 690 students becoming WildSafe Rangers and receiving activity kits (Table 1). The WCC received positive feedback from both the students and the youth camp leaders.

Table 1. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2023.

School	Grade	Students
Alberni District Secondary School	9 to 12	400
Haahuupayak school	6 and 7	44
John Howitt Elementary School	1 to 7	142
Tsuma-as Elementary	1, 5 and 6	49
Wood Elementary	K, 1, 2, 4 and 5	56
Total Participants		691

Presentations to Community Groups

WildSafeBC provides a variety of community presentations depending on the interest of the group, including wildlife awareness and safety, bear spray workshops, and electric fencing workshops. The WCC gave a total of 4 presentations to 40 participants providing information on general wildlife safety and awareness or electric fencing (Table 2). A bear spray workshop was scheduled and had to be canceled due to the road closure cause by the wildfire.

Table 2. Presentations provided in 2023.

Type of Presentation	Location	Participants	Date
Wilderness Safety & Awareness	United Church	16	May 31, 2023
Wilderness Safety & Awareness	Harbour Quay	8	July 27, 2023
Wilderness Safety & Awareness	Blair Park	14	August 3, 2023
Electric Fencing Workshop	Stamp River Provincial Park	6	September 24, 2023 (World Rivers Day)
Total Participants		44	

Display Booths

Display booths are an excellent way to reach multiple people over a short period of time to increase awareness about WildSafeBC and its messaging. This year, the WCC participated in 12 display booths and delivered education to over 1100 members of the public (Table 3 and Figure 2). The main topics discussed with booth attendees included wildlife attractant management and

how to stay safe in wildlife country. Booth attendees often shared their experiences with wildlife. The WCC also answered questions and discussed topics brought by attendees.

Table 3. WildSafeBC booths in 2023.

Location	Public Interactions	Date
Healthy School Caravan at EJ Dunn Elementary	51	June 8
Summer Pop Up	20	July 19
Uptown Market	41	July 19
Friday Night Market	62	July 21
Spirit Square Farmers' Market	85	July 22
Summer Pop Up	12	August 2
Friday Night Market	68	August 4
Spirit Square Farmers' Market	86	August 5
Alberni Fall Fair	545	September 7-10
Friday Night Market	47	September 22
Spirit Square Farmers' Market	35	September 23
World River Day	133	September 27
Total Interactions	1185	



Figure 2. WildSafeBC Display Booths at World River Day (left) and Summer Pop-Up (right).

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Through door-to-door education, a total of 35 people were reached during in-person conversations and over 19 homes were reached by leaving door hangers. Areas were prioritized for this activity due to reported black bear activity, including Margaret Street (Blair Park) and Klista Drive.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the night before collection. Garbage bin tagging was not complete this year due to the difficulty of commuting to Port Alberni with the wildfire and the closure of the Highway 4. This activity should be prioritized in the future, as it has proven to be an effective educational tool in past seasons.

Social Media and Press

Social Media was an effective way to share WildSafeBC messaging across the Alberni Valley. In 2023, the WCC shared 4 posts and the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Facebook page grew 9% from 459 to 501 page followers. The Port Alberni Valley Vibe published an [article](https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/803d97de-d4f2-4794-a3d3-78e5c501d8b1/downloads/Valley%20Vibe%20Fall%202023.pdf?ver=1698962621633) on actions that could be taken to keep wildlife wild and Alberni Valley community safe (Figure 3).



Alberni
WILDSAFE

WildSafeBC is the provincial leader in preventing conflict with wildlife through collaboration, education and community solutions. It is a program managed and delivered by the BC Conservation Foundation in communities across BC. Maude Tanguay, as the WildSafeBC Coordinator for Alberni Valley, will be working in the community to reduce human-wildlife conflict for the upcoming season. WildSafeBC acknowledges the land these programs operate on as the unceded traditional territories of the Hupačasath and Tšesahat First Nations.

From May to the end of November, we will be involved in a number of initiatives including education programs, training sessions and outreach at various events. You will see us at events around town as we spread the word about how to safely keep wildlife wild and communities safe.

In the past years, there have been several reports of animals including black bears, deer, and cougars in the area. When animals have access to garbage and other unnatural food sources, conflict situations can develop. Some animals may become food conditioned, and/or habituated to people. Habituated black bears tolerate humans in much closer proximity than what is safe for both black bears and humans. Food-conditioned black bears may become very motivated to access unnatural food sources, which can lead to property damage or increased concerns regarding public safety. It is particularly unfortunate to see so few black bears teaching cubs to forage for unnatural food among people – potentially leading to future conflicts and shorter lives.

The most effective action we can take to keep wildlife wild and our communities safe is to keep all attractants secure, including:

- Do not store garbage or other organic waste outdoors. If you have curbside collection, only put the containers out on the morning of collection day – never the night before. Make sure recyclables have been cleaned.
- Protect fruit trees with electric fencing or pick fruit early and do not let windfall accumulate. Ensure your compost is well-managed and does not smell.
- Avoid feeding birds when black bears are most active (April to November) and ensure birdfeeders are always inaccessible to non-target species such as bears, deer, squirrels and raccoons. Do not let seeds accumulate that may attract rats and other rodents.
- Feed pets indoors and keep pets inside at night.
- Keep your barbecue clean by burning off uncooked food and emptying the grease container.

To volunteer or for further information on reducing human-wildlife conflict, visit our website [wildsafebc.com](https://www.wildsafebc.com), follow WildSafeBC Alberni Valley on Facebook, or contact your local Community Coordinator, Maude, at alberni@wildsafebc.com.

Please report sightings of bears, wolves or cougars in urban/residential areas, or wildlife in conflict, to the Conservation Officer Service at 1-877-952-7277.

WildSafeBC Alberni Valley is grateful for the generous support the program receives from its funders including Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation and the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

Article and Photos Submitted by Wildsafe BC

Figure 3. Article in the Valley Vibe Fall 2023. Source: <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/803d97de-d4f2-4794-a3d3-78e5c501d8b1/downloads/Valley%20Vibe%20Fall%202023.pdf?ver=1698962621633>

Wildlife in Area Signs

“Wildlife in Area” signs were placed in areas of high wildlife activity throughout the season. In residential areas, specific residential “Bear in Area” signs were posted to encourage residents to take extra care when it comes to securing their garbage and compost before collection day.

Collaborations

Several collaborations were helpful to advance the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program this season. First, the WCC shared resources from the Alberni Valley Gleaning Project, including a brochure, to people who had human-wildlife conflicts due to fruit trees. The Alberni Valley Gleaning Project connects property owners who have excess produce with volunteers. The WCC also collaborated with the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service to identify hot spots of

wildlife activity where door-to-door canvassing or wildlife in area signs would be helpful to the community. Lastly, the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Coordinator collaborated with the WildSafeBC Nanaimo Coordinator to offer more WRP presentations.

WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to be 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 WildSafeBC's safety and conflict reduction information. In return, WildSafeBC will provide ongoing support to the business in the form of staff training, WildSafeBC materials, and a WildSafeBC Business Pledge poster. No new businesses were approached or signed up this season and this should be prioritized by future WCC's.

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. No new campsites were approached or participated in the program this season and this should be prioritized by future WCC's due to the high volume of recreational camping and tourism in the area.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement is an important aspect of the provincial WildSafeBC Program. This year, all WCC's across the Province completed an Indigenous Awareness Training with the Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. Further, the WCC for the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program delivered the WildSafe Ranger program to 44 students at Haahuupayak School.

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 BC. In the context of the 8th Annual BC Goes Wild, the WCC collaborated with WildSafeBC Pacific Rim, BC Parks, local First Nations and other local groups in the organization of Alberni Valley Rivers Day (Figure 4). The event was successful in celebrating our province's great biodiversity and spreading awareness regarding human-wildlife conflicts. A primary focus of the event was the essential interconnectivity between bears and salmon and the value of our local watersheds.



Figure 4. WildSafeBC Alberni Valley and WildSafeBC Pacific Rim collaborating at World River Day.

Challenges and Opportunities

A major challenge this season included the major wildlife in the area and the closure of Highway 4. The WCC did not live in the Alberni Valley and had limited access throughout the season, limiting some programming activities. This included bin tagging, the business pledge program, and the bare campsite program. Despite this challenge, the WCC was successful in reaching over 1800 people.

Garbage and organics continue to be a significant attractant for bears in the Alberni Valley reported to the COS. In the past, bin tagging education has proven to be a highly effective method of changing behavior. This should be a focus for the 2024 season. This could be combined with door-to-door education on bear-resistant bin options to increase the number of residential garbage bins equipped with a bear-resistant locks.

Fruit trees also continue to be a source of attractants in the community that draw wildlife into residential areas. To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2024:

- Electric fence demonstrations
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots areas

Next season, the WCC should use social media as a means to share more educational messaging. This includes collaboration with the ACRD and the City of Port Alberni to share WildSafeBC messaging on their websites and social media pages to provide more cohesive educational messaging about human-wildlife conflict management.

Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank Paulo Eichelberger, Brenda Sauve and Jodie Frank from the ACRD and Anna Lewis for their support and assistance in the delivery of the WildSafeBC program. The WCC would also like to thank Conservation Officers Katelyn Dyck, Andrew Riddell, and Sergeant Daniel Eichstadter for their support. Lastly, the WCC would like to thank Bylaw Enforcement Officers Andrea Alexander and Nathan Bourelle. The WCC would like to thank the Alberni Valley Community Coordinator, Sachin Sethi, for completing WRP in the Fall when capacity was limited. Special thanks to the BCCF team including Kathy Murray for their ongoing support throughout the season.