

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

Arrow-Slocan Lakes

Prepared by: Cora Skaien

WildSafeBC Arrow-Slocan Lakes Coordinator

(Formerly New Denver, Nakusp, Silvertown, and RDCK Areas H and K)



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Arrow-Slocan Lakes region (formerly known as the New Denver, Silverton, Nakusp and Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) Areas H and K region program) between April 10th and November 30th, 2023 (Figure 1). This region is on the traditional and unceded territory of many First Nations, namely the Sinixt Peoples, but the land was also utilized at times by the Syilx, Ktunaxa, and Secwépemc Peoples.

Information received from the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service (COS) shows there were 11 Human Wildlife Conflict Reports (HWCR) received in the region this year. The Arrow-Slocan Lakes WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities in a variety of forms with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community. In total, the WCC reached approximately 2,375 contacts through a variety of activities. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the 2023 season:

- 10 schools visited for WildSafe Rangers and 408 youth reached.
- 14 presentations given to community groups, reaching 152 participants.
- 19 people reached through door-to-door canvassing in person and 215 door hangers left
- 15 bin tagging outings and 39 bins tagged.
- 12 display booths and 1,171 people reached
- ~100 Facebook posts and 68 new Facebook page followers from January 1, 2023 to November 30, 2023.
- 8 news articles submitted to the *Valley Voice* and *Arrow Lakes News*.
- 1 campground successfully completed the requirements for the Bare Campsite program.
- 13 people provided with funds through a new cost-share program with Slocan Solutions.
- Ongoing support for the New Denver Bear Smart Working Group, with 5 meetings in 2023.

The WCC collaborated with several organizations to host events, including Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions, Slocan Solutions, Harvest Share, Valhalla Wilderness Society (VWS) Slocan Valley Area H Bear Smart Program, The Healthy Community Society, the Rosebery-Bonanza-Summit (RBS) Trail Alliance, Nakusp and Area Community Forest (NACFOR) and the Nakusp Public Library. For a third year in a row, the WCC collaborated with the VWS Slocan Valley Area H Bear Smart Program to host our third annual joint bear-western toad biology walk for BC Goes Wild in 2023, including a bear spray workshop.

WildSafeBC Arrow-Slocan Lakes is grateful for the generous support the program receives from its funders including the Villages of New Denver, Silverton and Nakusp, Regional District of Central Kootenay, Columbia Basin Trust, the BC Conservation Foundation and the Province of British Columbia. Key challenges this year were bears breaking into structures in the spring in some areas of the region, and bears hanging around town for several months in other areas. The WCC recommends continuation of education, cost-share programs on electric fencing and fruit tree replacement, bylaw enforcement, and regular meetings in the area to discuss conflict and solutions. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Arrow-Slocan Lakes coverage area.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2023 Season	4
Wildlife Activity	4
WildSafe Ranger Program.....	4
Presentations to Community Groups	5
Display Booths	7
Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging	8
Social Media and Press.....	10
Wildlife in Area Signs.....	11
Collaborations and.....	11
Special Initiatives.....	12
WildSafeBC Business Pledge.....	13
WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program	13

Indigenous Engagement.....	13
Challenges and Opportunities	14
Acknowledgements.....	15

Table of Figures

Figure 1. WildSafeBC Arrow-Slocan Lakes coverage area.....	2
Figure 2. The WCC presenting to Lucerne Elementary School. Photo credit: Veronika Chapman.	4
Figure 3. A temporary electric fence established around a plum tree in New Denver.	6
Figure 4. Gillian Sanders presenting at the New Denver Electric Fencing for Bears workshop in New Denver.	6
Figure 5. Typical display booth setup. This booth was hosted at the Silverton Flea Market on Canada Day.	7
Figure 6. Letter attached to door hangers with additional information to help reduce conflict with rats.....	8
Figure 7. Number of garbage bins placed out early for collection over three visits in New Denver from May to September, 2023.....	9
Figure 8. Number of garbage bins placed out early for collection over nine visits and three zones in Nakusp from May to September, 2023.	10
Figure 9. Number of garbage bins placed out early for collection over three visits in Silverton from May to September, 2023.....	10
Figure 10. Bear in Area sign located in the Kohan Garden, New Denver.	11
Figure 11. The bear and western toad biology hike, co-organized by the WCC and Amber Peters from the VWS Area H Bear Smart Program. Photo credit: Amber Peters.	12
Figure 12. The WCC wearing the WSBC orange shirt for September events. Photo credit: Amber Peters.....	14

Cover Photo: The WCC providing a Wilderness Safety and Awareness Presentation in Fauquier.

Highlights from the 2023 Season

Wildlife Activity

Over the course of the season, reports regarding human-wildlife conflict from the COS and the public occurred mostly in Fauquier and Rosebery in the spring, and then in New Denver from mid-summer onwards. Of the 11 Human-Wildlife Conflict Reports (HWCR) passed on from the COS to the WCC, 27% (3) were from Rosebery, 18% (2) were near or in Nakusp, 36% (4) were in New Denver and 18% (2) were in Area H south of Slocan.

The type of conflict differed in specific communities throughout the program area. HWCR's indicate that Fauquier experienced many occurrences of bears breaking into buildings, such as trailers and sheds in the spring. The WCC was informed that this learned this behaviour continued to be an ongoing issue for much of the season through community Facebook pages and discussions with community members. In New Denver, the main issue identified by the COS, Facebook community pages, and discussions with residents was the occurrence of a sow and her two cubs that resided in the Orchard for four months, growing increasingly habituated while accessing abundant fruit from fruit trees on private property. Through communications directly with residents during door-to-door and Farmers markets, the main issue reported to the WCC in Nakusp continued to be the increasing abundance of rats within the community.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. In 2023, the WCC visited 10 elementary schools and a daycare (Figure 2). In total, 408 youth became WildSafe Rangers and received WildSafe Ranger kits (Table 1). The interactive storyboard released in 2021 continued to be presented to youth in grade 3 and younger to more effectively communicate WildSafeBC messaging to young children. The WCC modified the WRP for many outdoor-learning based schools and presented the material while on a field trip through a forest, complete with identifying bear foods, nearby wildlife attractants, and searching for animal tracks. The WCC also trialed the Bear Destiny game created by the WildSafeBC Castlegar Community Coordinator, Tara Hallam.



Figure 2. The WCC presenting to Lucerne Elementary School. Photo credit: Veronika Chapman.

Table 1. Schools and programs that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2023. Stars indicate schools for which all or a portion of the students participated in the field trip version of the delivery of the program.

School/Program	Grade/Age	Students/Children
The Whole School in Winlaw		
Field Trip*	K-6	11
Bear Destiny Game	K-6	18
Heartwood Nature School*	Ages 4-9	9
Brent Kennedy Elementary School	K-5	133
Lucerne Elementary School		
June Cohort	K-4	31
October Cohort*	K-7	59
Nakusp Elementary School	K-4	114
Burton Elementary School	K-4	21
Edgewood Elementary School	K-4	3
New Denver Preschool	< 5 years age	9
	TOTAL	408

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave 14 community presentations to 152 participants in both indoor and outdoor settings. Presentation topics included Wildlife Awareness and Safety presentations, bear spray workshops, electric fencing workshops, a bear biology field trip, and a presentation on rats (Table 2; Figure 3; Figure 4). Electric fencing workshops were held in collaboration with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions. One electric fencing workshop held in Winlaw was additionally co-hosted with Valhalla Wilderness Society Slocan Valley Area H Bear Smart Program.

Table 2. Presentations and workshops provided in 2023 in the Arrow-Slocan Lake region.

Presentation Type	Event(s)	Date	Attendees (#)
Wilderness Awareness and Safety + Bear Spray	New Denver with RBS Trail Alliance	May 21, 2023	20
	Fauquier Community Group	June 24, 2023	20
	Nakusp Public Library	September 23, 2023	7
Electric Fencing Workshops	New Denver – Knox Hall	June 14, 2023	11
	Passmore Hall	August 23, 2023	6
	Nakusp Public Library	September 26, 2023	6
	Burton Community Hall	September 28, 2023	3
Bear Spray Workshops	Nakusp High School Outdoor Ed Class	June 1, 2023	9
	Nakusp and Slocan Transfer Stations	June 5, 2023	7
	New Denver Outdoor Ed Class	June 7, 2023	14
	New Denver – Greer Park	June 19, 2023	12
	Burton – Burton City Cider	July 9, 2023	4
Bear Biology Field Trips	Collaboration with VWS Area H Bear Smart Program + Bear Spray Workshop	September 15, 2023	8
Rat Presentation	Nakusp Pub: Three Lions Social House	June 7, 2023	25
	TOTAL		152



Figure 3. A temporary electric fence established around a plum tree in New Denver.



Figure 4. Gillian Sanders presenting at the New Denver Electric Fencing for Bears workshop in New Denver.

Display Booths

The WCC hosted 12 booths at farmers’ markets and local events in 2023 (Table 3; Figure 5). The WCC educated booth attendees on ways to distinguish different animal tracks, fun biology facts, what to do if you see a bear, the benefits of bear spray, how to avoid a bear encounter, and more. Combined, display booths reached approximately 1171 people.

Table 3. Dates and number of attendees at display booths in the region in 2023.

Event	Date	Attendees (#)
Goat Mountain Kids Centre Open House	May 21, 2023	10
New Denver Farmers’ Market	May 23, 2023	55
Nakusp Farmers’ Market	June 24, 2023	142
Silverton Canada Day Flea Market	July 1, 2023	50
Nakusp Farmers’ Market	July 8, 2023	151
New Denver Farmers’ Market	July 21, 2023	68
Nakusp Farmers’ Market	August 12, 2023	193
New Denver Farmers’ Market	August 25, 2023	87
Hills Garlic Festival	September 10, 2023	275
New Denver Farmers’ Market	September 15, 2023	35
Nakusp Farmers’ Market	September 23, 2023	52
Harvest Fest at Lucerne School	September 28, 2023	53
TOTAL		1171



Figure 5. Typical display booth setup. This booth was hosted at the Silverton Flea Market on Canada Day.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education was performed through door knocking or leaving door hangers to engage residents in conversation about how to reduce human-wildlife conflict. A total of 19 people were reached during in-person conversations and 215 door hangers were left at homes where residents were unavailable. Areas were prioritized based on reports of recent wildlife issues or if a high number of waste bins were tagged during a bin tagging session. In Nakusp, the WCC focused on education regarding rats, which included attaching rat brochures and additional information from the WildSafeBC website to the door hangers (Figure 6). In New Denver and Silverton, the focus was on bear attractants.

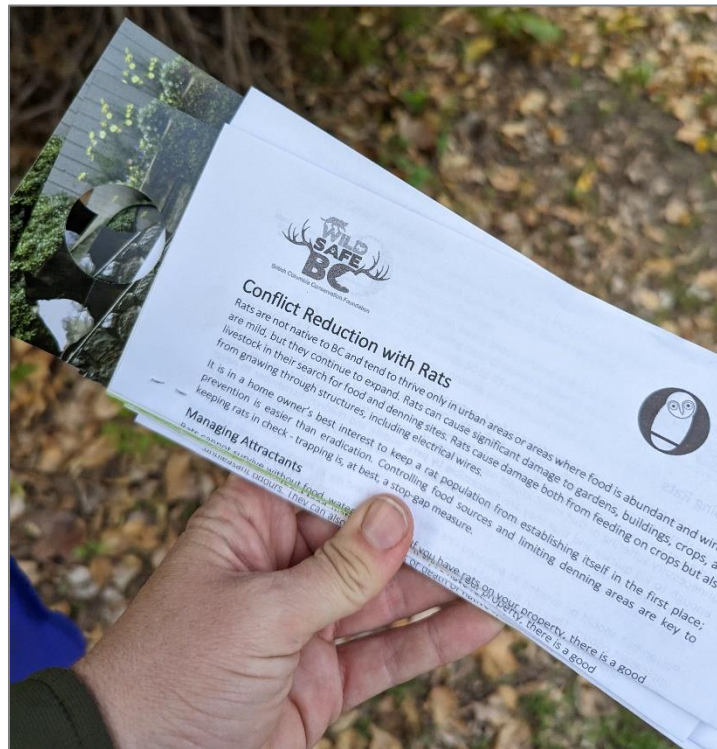


Figure 6. Letter attached to door hangers with additional information to help reduce conflict with rats.

Waste bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of solid waste containers set curbside the day before collection. During three outings in New Denver, four bins were tagged, accounting for 1.1% of houses surveyed (4 of 351 households), and zero households were tagged more than once (Figure 7). One bin observed on the final outing was completely destroyed by a bear, with garbage and pieces of garbage-bin strewn everywhere. During nine outings in Nakusp (three outings for each of the three zones), 32 bins were tagged, accounting for a total of 2.8% of households as one household had a bin tagged on all three visits (30 of 1,084 households) (Figure 8). Between New Denver and Nakusp, 36 bins total were tagged, which was 1.5 times as many as were tagged in 2022 (i.e., 24 bins in 2022), with the bulk of this increase occurring in Nakusp. This year, the WCC also performed garbage tagging in Silverton for the first time and a total of three bins were tagged over three outings, accounting for 2.0% of the households (3 of 149 households) (Figure 9). The effectiveness of garbage tagging for

changing behaviour is suggested by the 97.3% of the residences whose bins were tagged during an initial survey and then were not found on the curb again during subsequent surveys (Figures 7-9).

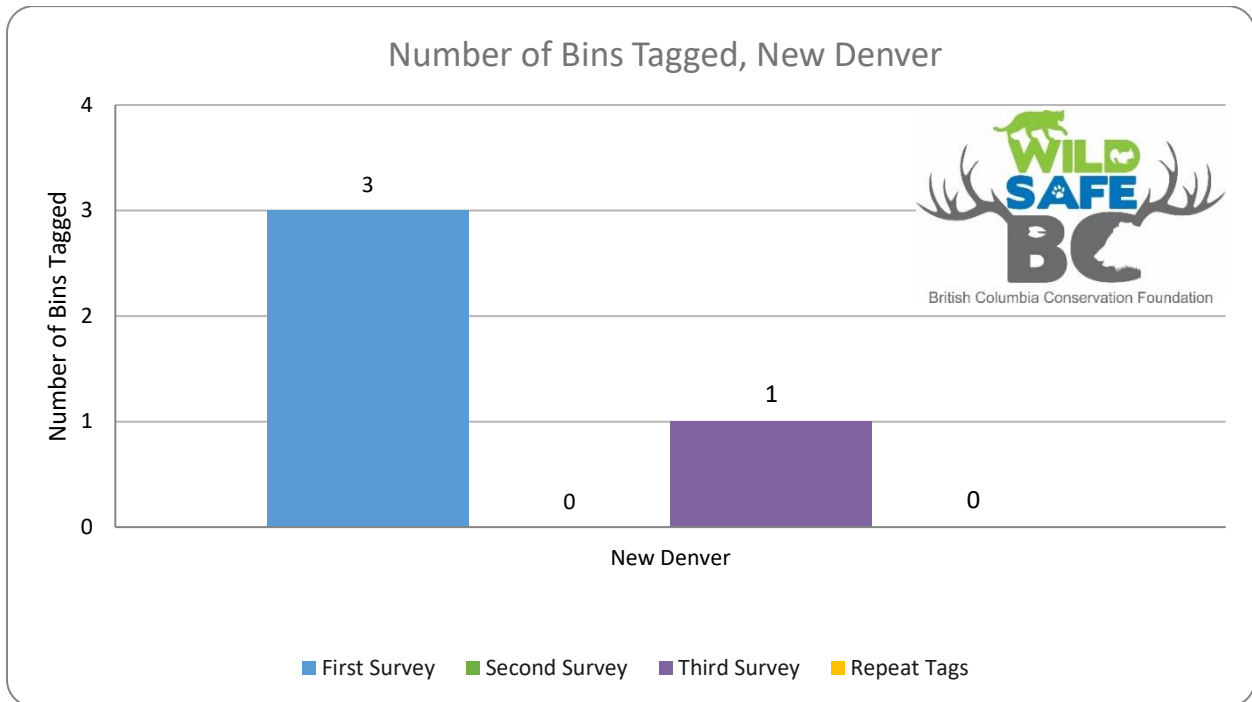


Figure 7. Number of garbage bins placed out early for collection over three visits in New Denver from May to September, 2023.

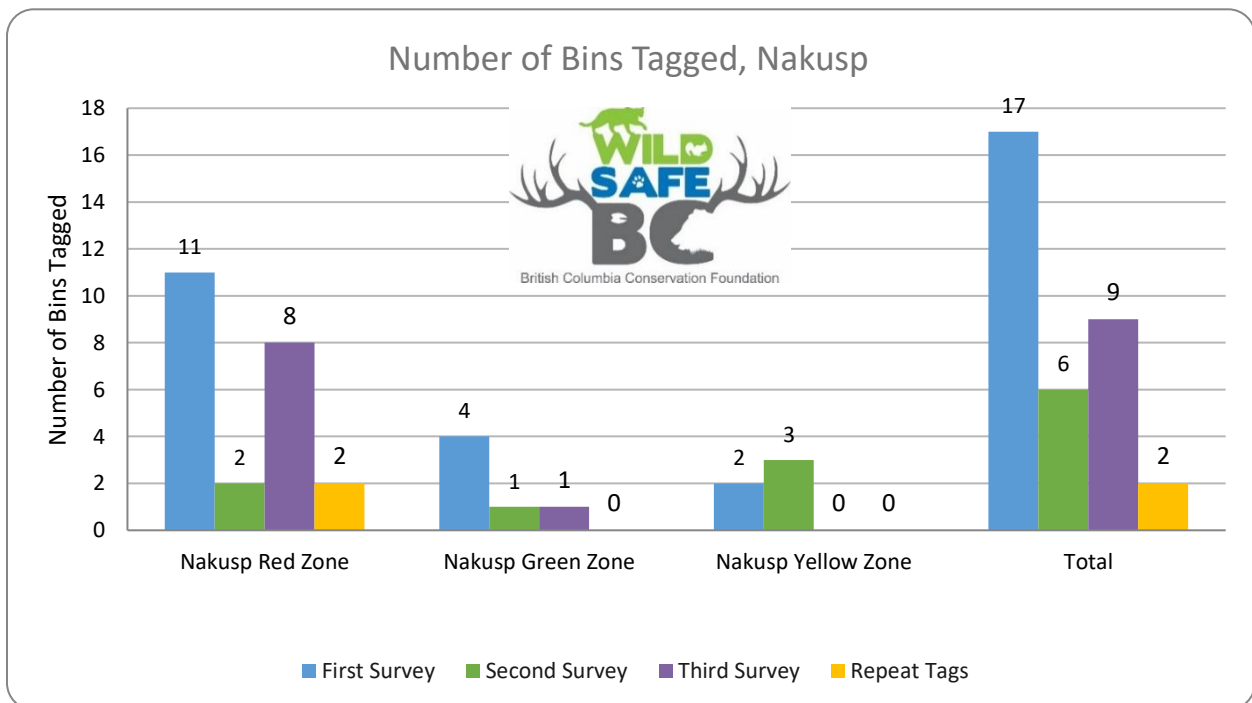


Figure 8. Number of garbage bins placed out early for collection over nine visits and three zones in Nakusp from May to September, 2023.

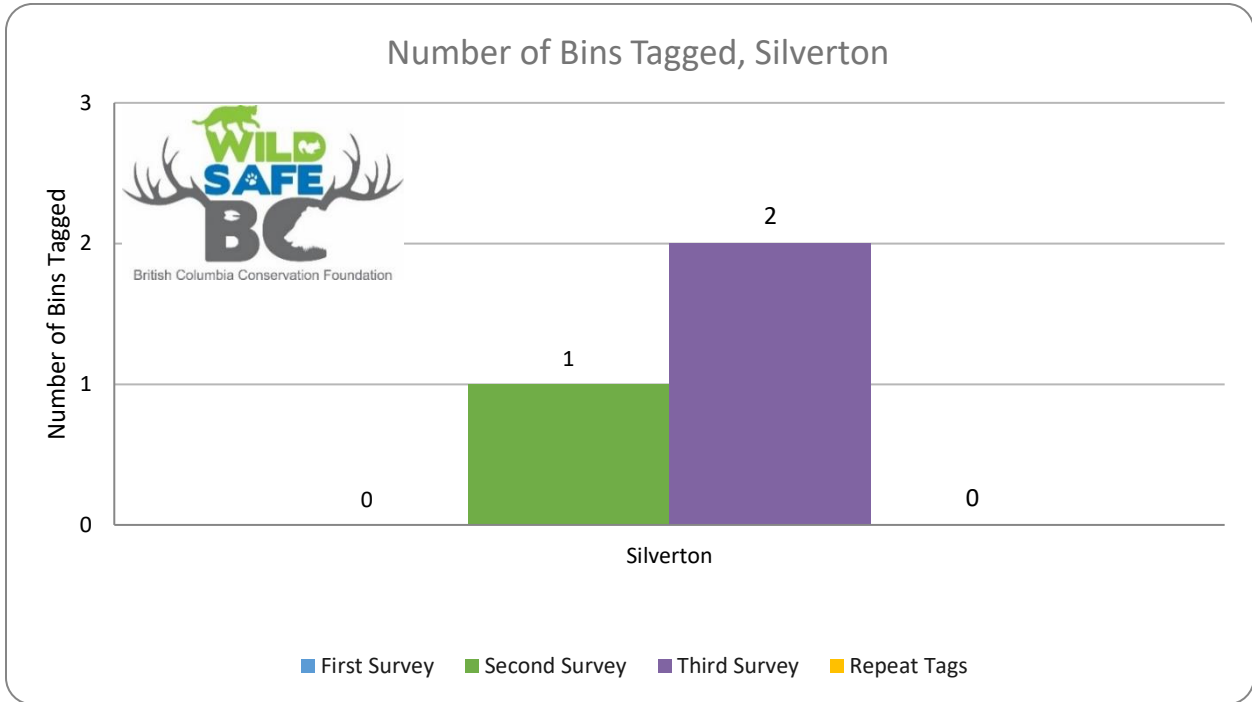


Figure 9. Number of garbage bins placed out early for collection over three visits in Silverton from May to September, 2023.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Arrow-Slocan Lakes Facebook page grew 11% from 604 to 672 followers from January 1 to November 15, 2023. Approximately 100 posts were made to the WildSafeBC Arrow-Slocan Lakes Facebook from April 11, 2022 to November 30, 2022, ranging in topics from local event information to wildlife safety and awareness. The WCC submitted eight news articles that were published in the *Valley Voice* or *Arrow Lakes News* in 2023. These publications included articles about bear biology, fruit tree management, the trial electric-fencing, fruit tree replacement cost-share program, and BC Goes Wild events:

- Arrow Lakes News – WildSafeBC Program return (April 24, 2023): <https://www.arrowlakesnews.com/entertainment/wildsafebc-program-back-for-2023-4629696>
- Arrow Lakes News – Reducing conflicts with bears (May 16, 2023): <https://www.arrowlakesnews.com/news/wildsafebc-provides-tips-to-help-reduce-conflicts-with-bears-4630355>
- Arrow Lakes News – Avoiding animal encounters (May 26, 2023): <https://www.arrowlakesnews.com/news/wildsafebc-offers-common-sense-advice-on-animal-encounters-4620789>

- Arrow Lakes News – BC Goes Wild Events (September 5, 2023):
<https://www.arrowlakesnews.com/news/bc-goes-wild-events-to-take-place-in-arrow-lakes-region-4633574>
- Arrow Lakes News – BC Goes Wild Events (September 7, 2023):
<https://www.arrowlakesnews.com/news/wildsafebc-returns-with-seventh-annual-go-wild-program-4623517>

Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife in Area signs (Figure 10) were established throughout the region from May to November 2023. Signs were first needed in Rosebery given the high bear conflict in the spring and were then needed throughout New Denver for most of the season (i.e., located at the campground, downtown and Kohan Garden areas). Although signs are normally kept up for 10 to 14 days and then removed once no further reports of the wildlife species are made, many of the signs put up in 2023 stayed up for much of the season given the steady level of bear conflict. Unfortunately, many signs were lost this year due to wind storms.



Figure 10. Bear in Area sign located in the Kohan Garden, New Denver.

Collaborations and

The COS continues to send reports to the WCC to request follow-up education to the specific areas where callers resided, and engage in ongoing discussions regarding human-wildlife conflict in the region. The WCC also collaborated with several organizations to host events in 2023, including Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions (electric fencing workshops), Slocan Solutions (cost-share program), Harvest Share, Valhalla Wilderness Society (VWS) Slocan Valley Area H Bear Smart Program, The Healthy Community Society, the RBS Trail Alliance (wilderness safety and awareness presentation), Burton City Cider, Nakusp and Area Community Forest (NACFOR; rats presentation) and the Nakusp Public Library (wilderness safety and awareness, electric fencing workshops).

Special Initiatives

Harvest Share

WildSafeBC Arrow-Slocan Lakes continues to collaborate with Harvest Share for fruit gleaning and loaner electric fence referrals in New Denver and Silverton. The two programs together oversee five loaner electric fences within New Denver and Silverton that can be established on private property to secure fruit trees before harvesting. The WCC also collaborated with the VWS Slocan Valley Area H Bear Smart Program to host a bear and western toad biology walk and bear spray workshop (Figure 11), as well as an electric fencing workshop in Passmore.



Figure 11. The bear and western toad biology hike, co-organized by the WCC and Amber Peters from the VWS Area H Bear Smart Program. Photo credit: Amber Peters.

Slocan Solutions Cost-Share Program

In 2023, the WCC also collaborated with Slocan Solutions to trial a cost-share program for fruit- and nut-tree replacement or supplemental costs for electric fencing materials in Area H and the associated communities. Funding for this program was obtained directly by Slocan Solutions from the RDCK Area H, Silverton, New Denver, and VWS. In 2023, we were able to fund 13 residents. In areas that were considered near grizzly-bear habitat, the WCC referred residents to Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions to discuss cost-sharing options for residents and general advice for electric fencing considerations. This included many areas in Area K that were not covered by the Slocan Solutions grant. The WCC hopes to expand the Slocan Solution cost-share program to Nakusp and areas in Area K not covered by the Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions funds in 2024.

New Denver Bear Smart Working Group

The WCC continued to chair the Bear Smart Working Group for New Denver in 2023. The group was composed of the CAO of New Denver (Lisa Scott), VWS (Amber Peters), the Healthy

Community Society (Julia Greenlaw), and 2-3 other community members. The group successfully met five times in 2023, and these meetings motivated the cost share program trialed this year.

Other Initiatives

Other initiatives underway include the establishment of a demonstration electric fence in New Denver, a bear-safe brochure specific to New Denver, ongoing support to VWS who provided cost-share on energizers as well as bear-resistant garbage containers in 2023, ongoing discussions of fruit tree management on public property, and ideas around future waste management in New Denver.

WildSafeBC Business Pledge

The WildSafeBC 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 safety and conflict reduction information. In return, WildSafeBC provides ongoing support to the business in the form of staff training, WildSafeBC materials (subject to budget constraints) and a WildSafeBC Business Pledge poster. No new businesses signed the business pledge this year.

WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

Through the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program, WildSafeBC provides clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. In 2023, the New Denver Municipal Campground successfully completed its training and implementation of the first phases of this program, becoming the first campground in this region to be officially designated as a Bare Campground under the WildSafeBC program. In 2024, the Nakusp Hot Springs should be revisited to try to implement this program fully.

Indigenous Engagement

In 2023, multiple WCCs from the Columbia Basin region met with Lori Barkley, anthropologist, to discuss sharing the Sinixt respect for wildlife and the environment in our presentations, and including greetings and other words from the local dialects of the First Peoples of this area into our presentations.

Additionally, at the beginning of the season, the WCC completed an online training course called “Working Effectively With Indigenous Peoples”, offered by Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. The WCC also wore an orange shirt for all events hosted in September to show support for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (Figure 12).



Figure 12. The WCC wearing the WSBC orange shirt for September events. Photo credit: Amber Peters.

Challenges and Opportunities

This year, New Denver hired a part-time Community Safety Officer (CSO) to help enforce bylaws and provide further education within the community. This provided the opportunity for the WCC and CSO to collaborate on door-to-door initiatives and work on educating the community on their local bylaws, which results in the CSO being available to provide education when the WCC is not.

There was an increased number of bears breaking into infrastructure (e.g., houses, sheds, cars) in 2023, suggesting that this will be an ongoing issue moving forward. Education in 2024 should focus on the importance of keeping vehicle windows closed, car doors locked, and remove all food and food wrappers from vehicles. Additional education may focus on the importance of not storing food in unoccupied buildings, even if canned, and managing other attractants around the buildings, such as fruit trees, that may be initially attracting bears to the area.

Fruit trees continue to be major attractants in local communities, drawing wildlife into residential areas. To address the abundance of fruit in the communities within this region, the following initiatives should continue to be implemented by WildSafeBC in 2024:

- Continued electric fence demonstrations and workshops;
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions using platforms such as social media, news articles, workshops, flyer addition to municipal tax information;

- Connect residents with Harvest Share, the fruit-gleaning organization in New Denver and Silverton, or Root and Branch, the fruit-gleaning organization in Nakusp
- Increased door-to-door canvassing in hotspots;
- Continue the cost-share program for electric fencing (in collaboration with VWS's cost-share for energizers) and fruit-tree replacement.
- Work with Harvest Share to have designated weekends where a group of volunteers goes around the community to ask if they can assist in picking fruits, nuts and windfall. Consider two different weekends, earlier and later in the fall, due to different timing of when different fruits ripen.

Additional considerations and opportunities for WildSafeBC in 2024 include:

- Emphasize the Bare Campsite program in municipal campgrounds early in the spring, and at provincial park campgrounds in the region;
- Emphasize the Business Pledge program;
- Increase door-to-door efforts throughout the region;
- Conduct regional group meetings every few months between CAOs of Nakusp, New Denver, Silverton, Slocan and Kaslo to discuss local bear conflict and solutions;
- Create Human-Bear Conflict Surveys for RDCK Areas H and K.

Considerations for municipalities to further help reduce human-wildlife conflict:

- Increase enforcement of bylaws for garbage not properly secured between collection days and any elements related to animal attractant bylaws, such as the requirement to pick up windfall from fruit trees and manage fruit and nut trees broadly;
- Strengthen local bylaws to require electric fencing around livestock such as chickens.

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Arrow-Slocan Lakes is grateful for the generous support the program receives from its funders including the Villages of New Denver, Nakusp and Silverton, the Regional District of Central Kootenay (Area K), Columbia Basin Trust, the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) and the Province of British Columbia. The WCC also thanks the BCCF team and the local Conservation Office Service team for communication and shared knowledge of wildlife activity and advice. Lastly, thanks to all the individuals and organizations the WCC collaborated with, including Audray Wright with Harvest Share, Gillian Sanders with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions, Amber Peters and Wayne McCrory with the Valhalla Wilderness Society Bear Smart Program for Area H, Julia Greenlaw with the Healthy Community Society, Richard Johnson with Slocan Solutions, Barbara Ross with Burton City Cider, Claire Paradis with the Nakusp Public Library, Skye Cunningham with NACFOR, and the RBS Trail Alliance.

