

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

Boundary

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Coordinator



BRITISH COLUMBIA
CONSERVATION FOUNDATION



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Boundary Program between May 1st and November 30th, 2023. The program coverage area includes areas E, D, and C of the Regional District of the Kootenay Boundary (RDKB) and the municipalities within, such as Christina Lake, Grand Forks, Greenwood, Midway, and Rock Creek (Figure 1). The British Columbia Conservation Foundation's WildSafeBC Program respectfully acknowledges that we operate on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Peoples throughout British Columbia. The Kootenay Boundary spans the traditional unceded territories of the Syilx Okanagan, Sinixt, Colville Confederated Tribes, and Ktunaxa Peoples.

Wildlife is abundant within the Boundary Region, with deer and black bears being the most reported species to the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service (COS) in 2023. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities to prevent and reduce human-wildlife conflicts in the community. The following activities took place in 2023, reaching a total of 2705 people:

- 27 WildSafe Rangers Program (WRP) presentations with 807 youth reached.
- 7 presentations given to community groups with 147 of participants.
- 85 people reached through Door-To-Door in person and 98 door hangers left at homes.
- 13 display booths and 1565 people reached
- 46 Facebook posts and 57 new Facebook page followers.
- 6 after school programs delivered with modified WRP presentations to 3 regular attendees
- 2 BC Goes Wild Events: the Bears n' Brews trivia event hosted at Grand Forks Brewing Co. and a Bare Camping workshop in Christina Lake Provincial Park.

This year, the WCC collaborated with the RDKB Grand Forks Recreation Department to launch the WildSafeBC Afterschool Program, where students met weekly to learn about wildlife. There was also active collaboration with the COS throughout the season for many activities that provided the opportunity to deliver joint messaging and education.

Overall, the WildSafeBC Boundary Program has been well-received, and participants and organizers expressed interest in seeing activities return in 2024. Much of the success this year is due in part to volunteers and community collaborators; the WCC would also like to thank its sponsors: The Christina Lake Stewardship Society, RDKB Areas C, D, and E, the City of Grand Forks, the City of Greenwood, the Village of Midway, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the Province of British Columbia.

Looking forward to next year, it will be essential to garner community interest in creating a wildlife working group focused on bear safety. Further, it is recommended that future WCC's tackle some misconceptions in the community about wildlife activity and the role of the COS. Future WCC's should also expand WildSafeBC afterschool programming to other schools within the Boundary, and continue with the delivery of the WRP and booths at community events. These initiatives and collaborations will help "keep wildlife wild and our community safe."

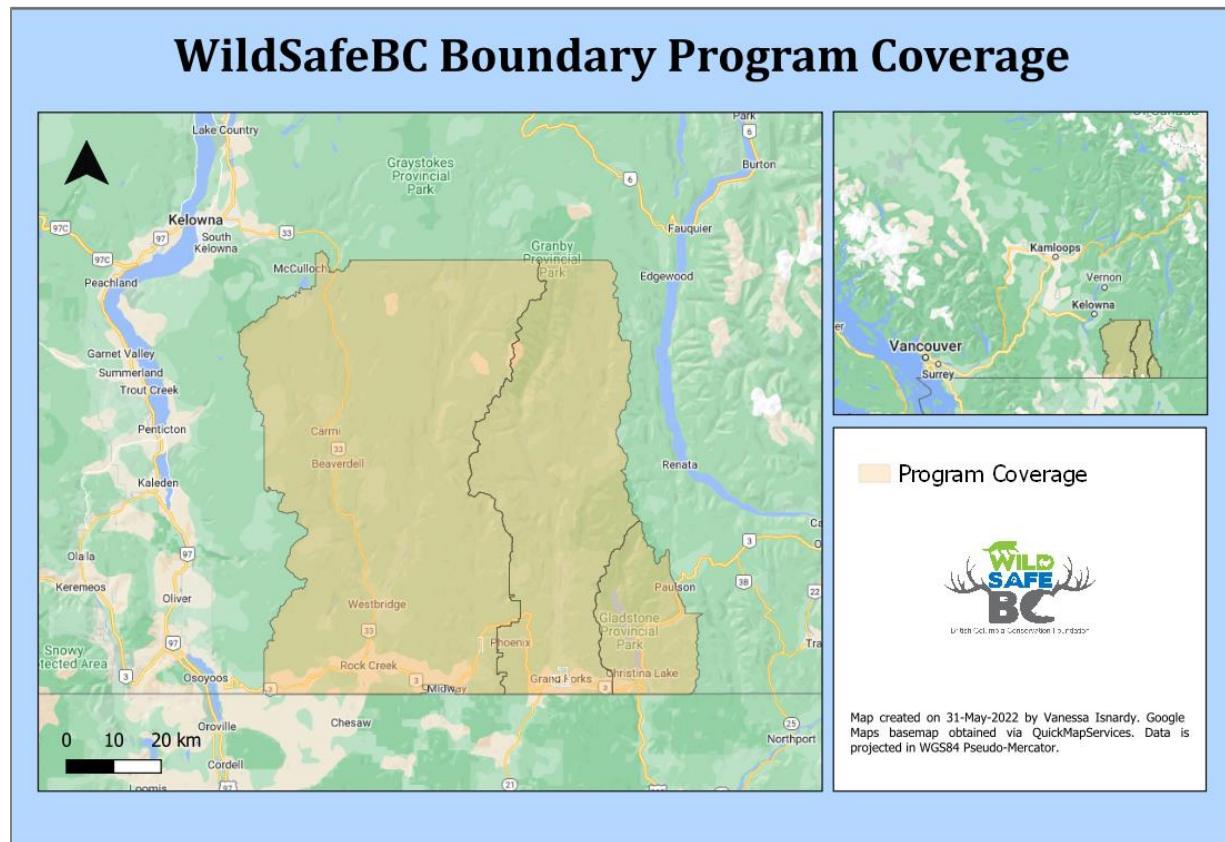


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Boundary program coverage area.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2023 Season	5
Wildlife Activity	5
WildSafe Ranger Program.....	7
Presentations to Community Groups	9
Display Booths	10
Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging	12
Social Media and Press	12
Wildlife in Area Signs.....	12
Collaborations	13
WildSafe Business Pledge.....	14
WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program	14
Indigenous Awareness and Engagement	14
Special Initiatives.....	15
Challenges and Opportunities	16
Acknowledgements	19

Table of Figures

Figure 1. WildSafeBC Boundary program coverage area.....	2
Figure 2. Reports to the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service regarding black bears from January 1, 2014, to October 31, 2023.	5
Figure 3. Reported Black Bear Attractants to the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service within the Boundary region in 2023.	6
Figure 4. Reports to the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service regarding wildlife in the Boundary region from January 1 to October 31, 2023.	6
Figure 5. WildSafe Rangers Presentation at Christina Lake Stewardship Society.	7
Table 1. Schools/Organizations that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2023.....	7
Figure 6. Drawings made by elementary school students after participating in the WRP.....	8
Figure 7. WildSafeBC after school program participants practicing bear safety.....	8
Table 2. Presentations delivered to community groups during the 2023 season.	9
Figure 8. Wildlife Awareness and Safety Presentation poster created by BCCF staff.....	9
Figure 9. Booth display set-up at Grand Forks Fall Fair	10
Table 3. Event Booth attendance throughout the Boundary Region.	10
Figure 10. The WCC ready to speak with community members at the Rock Creek Fall Fair.	11

Figure 12. “Cougar in Area” sign posted near a playground within sight of where a cougar was last seen.	13
Figure 13. Sign outside Grand Forks Beer Co. for Bears N' Brews trivia event.	13
Figure 14. The WCC ready to talk with patrons before the Bears n' Brews trivia event.	15
Figure 15. Bare Campsite set-up with a variety of attractants and other items.	16
Figure 17. Images of advertisements, created by RDKB Community Programmer, printed on page 17 of Fall/Winter 2023/24 Community Leisure Guide.....	17
Figure 18. An injured deer in Grand Forks accessing attractants in a central neighbourhood....	18
Figure 19. Sunset over the Kettle River.....	19

Cover Photo: A view from Phoenix Mountain overlooking the Boundary Region.

Highlights from the 2023 Season

Wildlife Activity

The WCC received data from reports made to the COS through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) or online form (<https://forms.gov.bc.ca/environment/rapp/>) directly from the local COS this season. This report includes COS reported data from January 1, 2023 to November 15, 2023.

In 2023, there were 208 Human-Wildlife Conflict Reports made to the COS (Figure 2). Black bears were the most commonly reported with 65 reports within the Boundary. Wildlife activity for cougars, deer, and other wildlife was also reported, with 22, 90, and 31 reports respectively (Figure 4). The City of Grand Forks experienced the highest number of reports this year than the smaller surrounding communities in the WildSafeBC Boundary Program area.

Garbage remained the most reported attractant for black bears, followed by livestock, and outdoor freezers (Figure 3). There was a peak in reports for black bears experienced in June and September, which coincide with bears becoming active in the Spring and enter hyperphagea in the Fall (Figure). The increase in wildlife activity may also result from natural disturbance, as fires were prevalent in much of the province, especially neighbouring regions. There is also a significant presence of urban deer in municipalities throughout the Boundary. Deer not only act as attractants for wildlife such as cougars, but some residents actively feed deer and these artificial food sources act as another wildlife attractant.

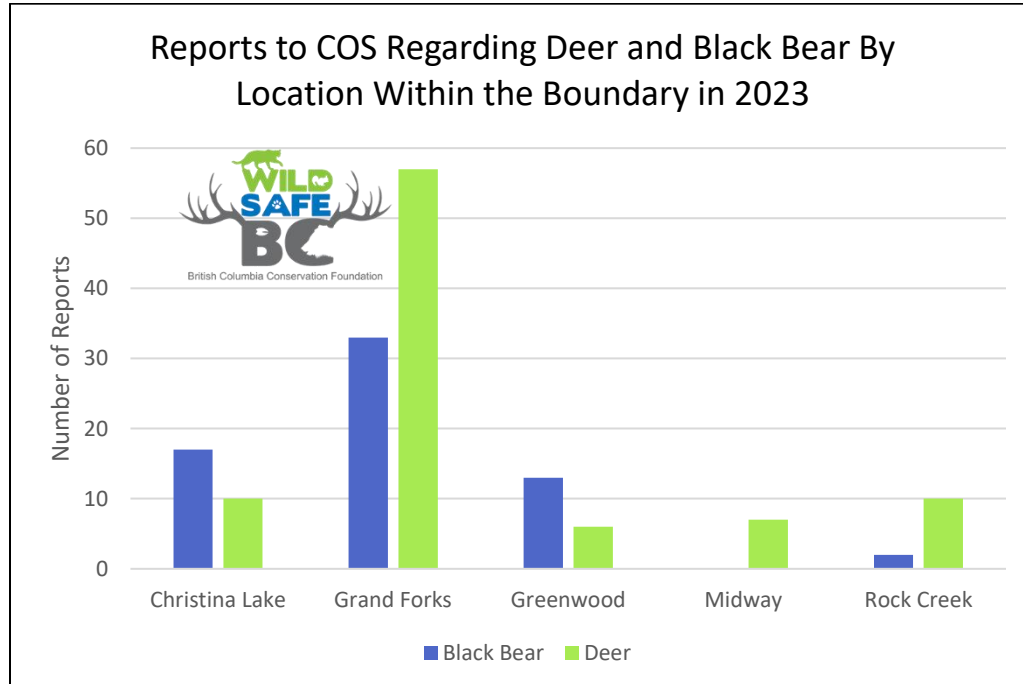


Figure 2. Reports to the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service regarding black bears from January 1, 2014, to October 31, 2023.

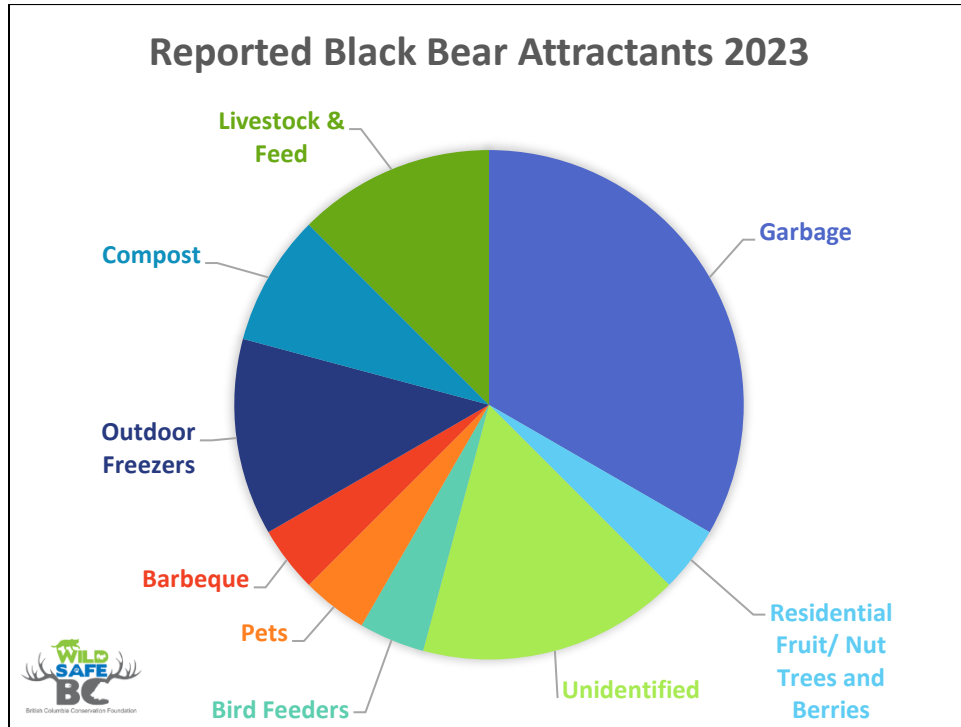


Figure 3. Reported Black Bear Attractants to the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service within the Boundary region in 2023.

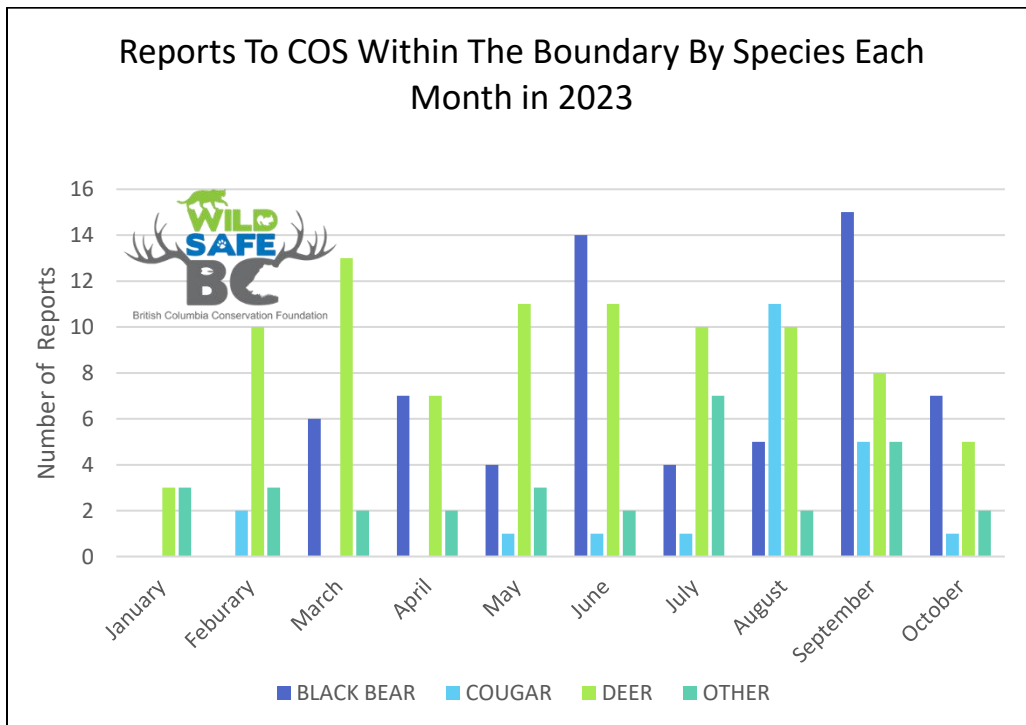


Figure 4. Reports to the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service regarding wildlife in the Boundary region from January 1 to October 31, 2023.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict through engaging lesson plans (Figure 5). Youth are encouraged to take an active role in reducing human-wildlife conflict at home by helping their families identify backyard wildlife attractants. Children also learn how to have a safe and respectful relationship with wildlife. A total of five schools and six organizations participated in the WRP (Table 1). Over 700 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits or Black Bear WildSafeBC pamphlets. Of these, 75 students received a BC Goes Wild extended version, which included rotations of a Bare Campsite workshop, a “Thinking like a Bear” activity, and a WildSafeBC Scavenger Hunt. The WRP was well supported and children sent drawings about the lessons learned to the WCC following the presentation (Figure 6).



Figure 5. WildSafe Rangers Presentation at Christina Lake Stewardship Society.

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

Schools/Organizations	Grade/Age	Participants (#)
BC Summer Reading Club	School Aged	5
Christina Lake Stewardship Society	School Aged	7
Christina Pines Campground	Families	20
West Boundary Elementary School	K-7	105
John A. Hutton Elementary School	K-7	240
Dr. D.A. Perley Elementary School	K-7	225
Christina Lake Elementary School	K-7	77
Midway Public Library	Families	18
Greenwood Elementary School	K-7	70
Sparks & Embers Girl Guides	5-8yrs	20
Lil' Explorers	0-5yrs & pparents	10

GF Rec Fri-YAY PLAY Camp	K - 4	10
Total Participants		807

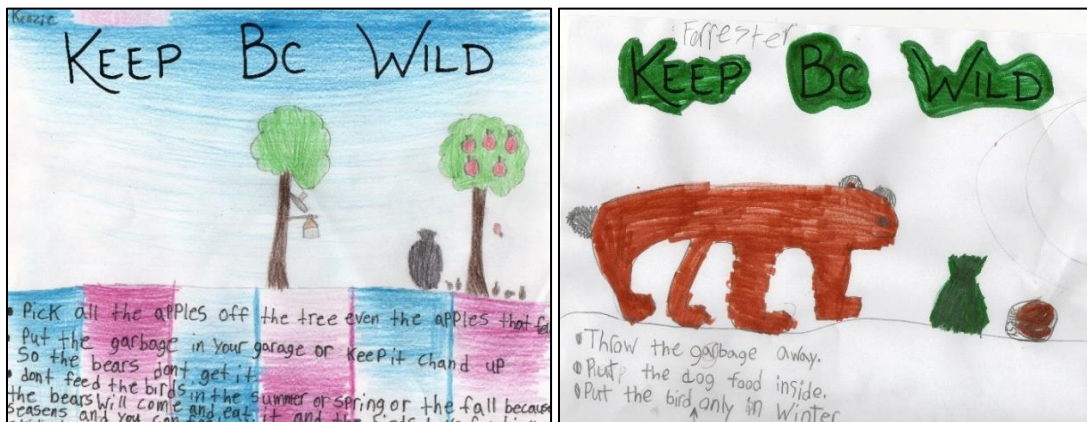


Figure 6. Drawings made by elementary school students after participating in the WRP.

This season, the WCC endeavored to launch a modified WRP After School Program in collaboration with the RDKB Grand Forks Recreation department. Boundary School District 51 provided facilities for the program that ran for 8 weeks on Tuesday evenings. The WCC met students weekly to educate them about different wildlife species at Perley Elementary School's Re-Wilding Space (Figure 7). This program was offered to students from both Perley and Hutton Elementary schools anytime during the fall. Three students, who pre-registered, came consistently to the program and there were no drop-ins even though it was an option. Students were informed about the after school program during regular WRP presentations and expressed interest in attending. However, other commitments and conflicting schedules may have prevented those interested from attending the program. If the program is advertised earlier in the year and the start time is adjusted, the WildSafeBC after school program could see higher attendance.



Figure 7. WildSafeBC after school program participants practicing bear safety.

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave six in-person presentations to over 130 participants (Table 2). Presentation topics included Wildlife Safety and Awareness Presentations and Program Activity Reports.

Table 2. Presentations delivered to community groups during the 2023 season.

Venue	Presentation Type	Date (2023)	Attendees (#)
Grand Forks Recreation Commission Meeting	WildSafeBC Boundary Program Overview	September 14	12
Christina Lake Recreation Commission Meeting	WildSafeBC Boundary Program Overview	September 25	6
Grand Forks Jack Goddard Memorial Arena Viewing Room	Wildlife Safety & Awareness	October 12	8
Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy Grand Forks	Wildlife Safety & Awareness	October 16	2
Boundary Services Committee Meeting	WildSafeBC Boundary Program Overview	November 1	8
Christina Lake Watershed Management Plan Meeting	Wildlife Safety/ WildSafeBC Boundary Program Overview	November 15	95
Total Participants			131

Wildlife Safety & Awareness Presentations offer an in-depth presentation to participants that covers a wide range of wildlife information relevant to living, working, growing and playing within BC (Figure 6). The WCC adapted the presentations to be relevant to the Boundary region.



Figure 8. Wildlife Awareness and Safety Presentation poster created by BCCF staff.

A Program Activity Report consists of a summary of the WCC activities during the 2023 season. This includes information on the activities conducted and how these activities help manage human-wildlife conflicts. The WCC educated attendees about human-wildlife conflicts and what it means for an animal to become human-habituated or food-conditioned. The WCC also provided community solutions to reduce these conflicts. Program Activity Reports allow the WCC to engage with community stakeholders and share information about the WildSafeBC Program. This also offers stakeholders the valuable opportunity to ask questions.

Display Booths

The WildSafeBC booth display was a popular feature at several events throughout the Boundary (Figure 9). The WCC set up a display booth at 13 local community events throughout the season connecting with over 1550 members of the public (Table 3). The numerous WildSafeBC educational booths allowed community members to interact with the WCC and ask questions in person (Figure 10). Booth setups enabled the WCC to educate many people about wildlife, wildlife attractants, and how to stay safe in wildlife country.



Figure 9. Booth display set-up at Grand Forks Fall Fair

Table 3. Event Booth attendance throughout the Boundary Region.

Venue	Date (2023)	Visitors (#)
Canada Day Booth	July 1	92
Founders Day	July 16	Uncounted

Grand Forks Farmer's Market	July 21	87
Grand Forks Farmer's Market	July 25	138
Grand Forks Farmer's Market	July 28	119
Kid's Country Carnival	August 12	117
Grand Forks Farmer's Market	August 25	121
Grand Forks Farmer's Market	September 1	118
Grand Forks Fall Fair	September 9 & 10	262
The Parade of Programs	September 13	36
Rock Creek Fall Fair	September 16 & 17	400
Prevention Day	October 14	75
Total Participants		>1565



Figure 10. The WCC ready to speak with community members at the Rock Creek Fall Fair.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

The WCC engaged with 85 people during door-to-door education through in-person conversations and left 98 door hangers at residences for people who were not at home during the canvassing time. Areas were prioritized for this task based on high wildlife activity levels, including the south end of Christina Lake and central Greenwood. These areas likely see increased wildlife activity as they are located closer to wildlife corridors and have increased levels of attractants. Some of these neighbourhoods are more densely populated, which results in more accessible garbage and compost. The WCC urged community members in these areas to secure all attractants on and in between solid waste collection days.

Garbage bin tagging involves placing a bright, visible, and removable warning sticker on top of containers placed on the curbside early, the day before collection. The WCC did not perform bin tagging this season and focused on in-person community education and outreach through WildSafeBC booth events and WRP for 2023.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Boundary Facebook page grew by about 10% in 2023, from 521 to 576 followers. The WCC created 44 posts with topics, including the new Boundary Coordinator introduction, the BC Goes Wild Photo Contest, WildSafeBC Booth promotion, wildlife safety and awareness tips, and attractant management strategies. This year, community members visited the WildSafeBC Boundary page over 700 times and posts reached over 8,000 viewers in several different community groups.

The WCC distributed several press releases and contributed to local news articles during the season. Press releases included information about managing wildlife attractants, staying safe in wildlife country, and the end of the WildSafeBC season. Local news articles were printed in the Grand Forks Gazette on September 6 and 22, 2023. Articles covered information on staying safe while recreating, avoiding cougar encounters and managing attractants (<https://www.grandforksgazette.ca/news/cougar-attacks-on-animals-reported-in-boundary-area-4831771>), as well as bear life history and attractant management (<https://www.grandforksgazette.ca/opinion/help-keep-bears-out-of-harms-way-in-the-kootenays-4997046>).

Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife in Area signs were installed in neighbourhoods that had reported wildlife sightings and in areas where there confirmed human-wildlife conflicts reported to the COS. Signs posted were “cougar in area” signs with the “last seen” date updated as regularly as possible. The signs remained in Christina Lake throughout the fall after reports of a cougar sighting and a kill site located close to human activity (Figure 11). Wildlife in Area signs serve as a reminder for people to give wildlife space and keep house pets and other attractants secure.



Figure 11. "Cougar in Area" sign posted near a playground within sight of where a cougar was last seen.

Collaborations

Community collaborations are essential to the success of the WildSafeBC Program. The 2023 season was a joint effort between many organizations. Grand Forks Brewing Co. provided sound equipment and space for and helped promote the BC Goes Wild Bears n' Brew's Trivia Event hosted by the WCC (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Sign outside Grand Forks Beer Co. for Bears N' Brews trivia event.

Additionally, the Christina Lake Stewardship Society collaborated with the WCC to run a joint booth at one of the Grand Forks Farmers markets, a parade float at the Grand Forks Christmas Parade, facilitated many networking opportunities, and acted as a sounding board for ideas and troubleshooting. There was also active collaboration with the COS throughout the season. Local Conservation Officers contacted the WCC with requests for education and outreach in particular problem areas. The WCC attended some properties with local Conservation Officers to educate residents, ran WSBC booths together, presented at the Christina Lake Watershed Management Plan community meeting, and worked on a shared float to participate in the Grand Forks Christmas Parade.

WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to set good examples and adopt practices that will reduce conflict with wildlife to keep their staff and patrons safe and wildlife wild. 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 (subject to budget constraints) and a WildSafeBC Business Pledge poster. No new businesses signed the pledge this year. Two outdoor recreation-based businesses were contacted within the Boundary Region in 2023. Following seasons may be more successful with the Business Pledge Program if businesses are approached earlier in the season with follow-up.

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 participated in the Bare Campsite program this year. One campsite was approached about the program in 2023. Following seasons may be more successful with the Bare Campsite Program if campgrounds are approached earlier in the season with follow-up.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

At the start of the season, the WCC completed an Indigenous Awareness - Self-Guided Training course. The course was over 3 hours long and covered many topics: understanding how history impacts Indigenous Peoples, how current Indigenous issues impact Indigenous communities, Indigenous self-government, the constitutional, political and legal context of Indigenous issues, and how Indigenous and western world views impact decision-making. This course enabled the WCC to have a better understanding of how to intentionally engage with indigenous peoples in a respectful and informed manner. The Boundary region is a vast region that overlaps the traditional territories of many Indigenous Peoples, such as the Syilx Okanagan, Sinixt, Colville Confederated Tribes, and Ktunaxa Peoples. Some of these nations have legal rights to areas of the Boundary, some have territory through the colonial land claims process, and some are still working towards re-establishing a relationship with their traditional territories. It is essential to understand that only some agree on this subject and that many perspectives exist. The WCC also met with a

representative from the Autonomous Sinixt, along with other WCCs in the Columbia Basin Regional group, to learn about land acknowledgements, their purpose, and their meaningful weight.

Special Initiatives

The WCC participated in multiple special initiatives throughout the season. BC Goes Wild is a campaign to celebrate wildlife in BC, and it occurs during September when we consistently see human-bear conflicts at their highest in BC. On September 21st, the WCC hosted a Bears n' Brews trivia event that consisted of a WildSafeBC information booth inside the brewery where patrons could interact with and ask the WCC questions (Figure 13), followed by a Wildlife Trivia session where participants tested their knowledge. After the trivia, a question review session provided educational dialogue to participants. A total of 15 people participated in the event.



Figure 13. The WCC ready to talk with patrons before the Bears n' Brews trivia event.

In addition, this year's activities also included a 'Bare' Camping workshop in that the WCC designed and implemented in Christina Lake Provincial Park. Christina Lake Elementary School students walked to the Provincial Park and rotated through three group activity sessions, including a Bare Campsite Investigation, scavenger hunt, and game. During the Bare Campsite Investigation session, participants explored a temporary "campsite" that the WCC had set up with a mixture of various bear attractants and typical camping gear (Figure 14). Participants worked in pairs to search the site and fill out a worksheet with their guesses as to what items were the attractants. After all the participants had made their guesses, participants reviewed a fact sheet and did one last search for any missed attractants before gathering with the WCC to discuss the answers. In the Scavenger Hunt session, participants explored the park and completed a WildSafe Rangers competition Nature Bingo activity with teacher guidance. For the "Thinking Like a Bear" activity, participants completed a WildSafe Rangers worksheet activity. Participants travelled with a teacher through the neighbourhood to identify and record all potential sources of bear food, water, and shelter seen during the walk. The activity sheet also prompted students to think about how having bears in town might be risky for the bears and what people can do to keep bears wild and their community safe. A total of 75 participants participated in the event.



Figure 14. Bare Campsite set-up with a variety of attractants and other items.

Challenges and Opportunities

This year was relatively successful despite many smoky days due to forest fires and the learning curve of being a first-time WCC. In preparation for continued success next year, it will be essential for WCC's to address the common misconception that making a report to the COS will result in the death of wildlife. Many community members report sightings on community Facebook groups

rather than report to the RAPP line and responded negatively when encouraged to make a report. After much encouragement and door-to-door engagement, community members reported to the RAPP line and these reports enabled the local COs to respond to a cougar in conflict.

The WCC was unavailable for the Christina Lake Homecoming event, which is very popular and has the potential to reach many community members. For 2024, this event should have a WildSafeBC booth and a sign-up session for a follow-up Wildlife Awareness and Safety presentation. Promoting events within the Boundary proved to be a challenge and some community events could have been better attended. The WCC found that word-of-mouth was the most effective method to reach audiences in the Boundary. The WCC used Facebook as the primary platform to promote events. However, the WCC announced some events in the Grand Forks Gazette and the Grand Forks & Christina Lake Community Leisure Guide and advertised at booths such as the Parade of Programs event booth.

To have WildSafeBC messaging reach a wider audience within Boundary communities the following initiatives should be implemented in 2024:

- Continued education campaign focusing on attractants and the role of the COS through social media, news articles, workshops, and potentially a flyer in municipal tax information.
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots.
- Having events planned before the release of the Grand Forks & Christina Lake Community Leisure Guide – events advertised in the leisure guide saw higher attendance than events not advertised. See images of advertised events (Figure 15).

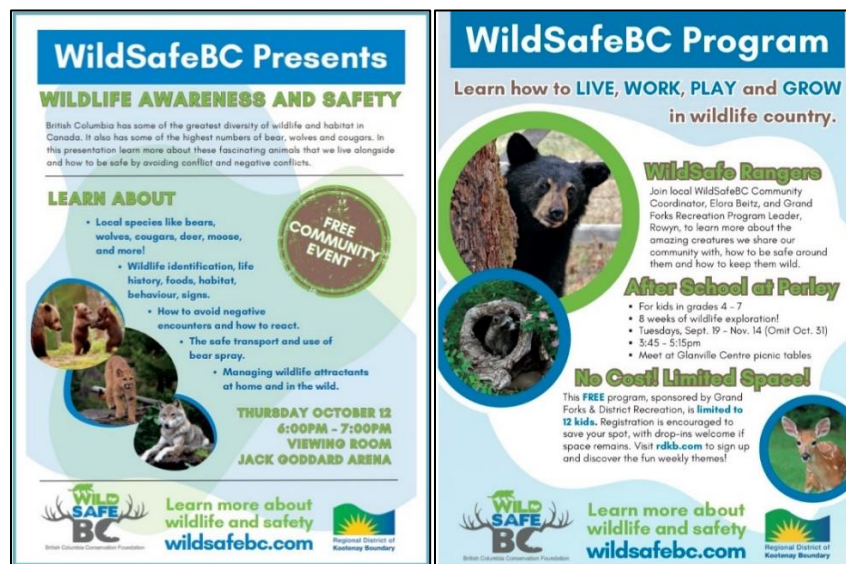


Figure 15. Images of advertisements, created by RDKB Community Programmer, printed on page 17 of Fall/Winter 2023/24 Community Leisure Guide.

Garbage remains the number one attractant within communities that draw wildlife into residential areas. Reports to the COS indicate bears entered structures and remained in people's yards, impacting the neighbourhood's safety. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community and would benefit from increased education and garbage tagging activities. An

increase in public awareness can be most effectively accomplished via in-person discussions and education and will be particularly helpful given the rise in new residents to the area. The Boundary Region is seeing a continued increase of young families seeking rural lifestyles, and all residents must be aware of their potential attractants and concerns around human-wildlife conflict. The WCC focused on in-person community education and outreach through WildSafeBC booth events for 2023. Bin tagging will take place in 2024 to work as an effective education tool in tandem with in-person education facilitation.



Figure 16. An injured deer in Grand Forks accessing attractants in a central neighbourhood.

The number of reports of conflict with deer has increased within the Boundary this year. Many people at booths, WRP presentations, and Wildlife Safety and Awareness presentations mentioned instances of people actively feeding deer. It is imperative not to provide deer with food intentionally. Feeding deer attracts them into residential spaces which creates a public safety concern and can draw other predatory species, such as cougars, into the area. Additionally, the attractants left out for deer can attract bears and other wildlife. A higher population of human-habituated deer within residential areas can lead to vehicle collisions, destruction of property, injury from deer attacks, and increased number and activity of larger predators in the area, such as cougars. The Wildlife Act does not specifically prohibit deer feeding, and the COS cannot act on instances of people feeding deer. It would be beneficial to have an educational campaign in 2024 with the message to refrain from feeding deer. The Regional District would also benefit from enacting a bylaw to prohibit the feeding of deer. Only Deer Feeding Bylaw No. 1967 in Grand Forks and Bylaw No. 542, “A Bylaw of The Village of Midway to Prohibit Feeding of Deer,” exist. A bylaw would enable bylaw officers to collaborate with the WCC to respond to potential conflicts before they escalate or result in habituated wildlife. A bylaw would also act as a deterrent to limit the number of residents engaging in this harmful activity.

Acknowledgements

The WCC wishes to thank the BCCF team for their continued support and expertise, as well as all of the program sponsors: The Christina Lake Stewardship Society, RDKB Areas C, D, and E, the City of Grand Forks, the City of Greenwood, the Village of Midway, the BC Conservation Foundation, and the Province of British Columbia.

A special thank you goes out to: Christina Lake Stewardship Society Coordinator Lyra Tuck, Senior Stewardship Assistant LeeAnne Wolf, Christina Lake Stewardship Society President Dave Johnson, Conservation Officer Brock VanDamme, Conservation Officer Marc Plamondon, Grand Forks & District Recreation Supervisor Melina Van Hoogevest, Grand Forks & District Recreation Community Programmer Amy Shields, Grand Forks & District Manager of Facilities and Recreation Paul Keys, Aquatics Coordinator Megan Tiller, Head Guard Richard Friesen, Grand Forks Market Manager Christina Hagemann, Fire Chief James Runciman, Rock Creek & Boundary Fair Association Vendor & Sponsorship Coordinator Lesli Voss, Grand Forks and District Fall Fair Society Secretary Doreen Sorensen, Boundary Invasive Species Program Coordinator Erin Kitchen, RDKB Vice-chair Grace McGregor, and RDKB Electoral Area' D'/Rural Grand Forks Director Linda Kay Wiese.

This season's activities could not have happened without the help of Boundary Country Regional Chamber of Commerce Member Support Erin Slade, Kody Babakaiff, and Colin Lee-Mitchell, who all volunteered their time and efforts.



Figure 17. Sunset over the Kettle River