

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

Castlegar and Area

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CASTLEGAR

Executive Summary

This report describes the activities, highlights and challenges of the WildSafeBC Castlegar Program between April 10 and November 30, 2023. The program area includes the City of Castlegar and the communities located in Areas I and J within the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) (Figure 1). WildSafeBC would like to acknowledge that Castlegar and the surrounding area are located on traditional territories of the Sinixt Nation.

The main goal of the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) is to assist communities in preventing conflicts through educational programs and collaborations with the City of Castlegar and the COS. The following WildSafeBC activities were completed by the WCC in 2023:

- There were 55 WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) presentations for 1274 children.
- A total of 10 Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray presentations for 177 people.
- A total of 246 brochures or door hangers were distributed through 6 canvassing sessions.
- 122 bins tagged over 24 nights in 4 different areas within the City of Castlegar.
- 7 display booths reaching over 518 people.
- The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page grew from 800 to 842 followers.
- Wildlife in Area signs were rotated through various locations throughout Castlegar.
- In collaboration with the City of Castlegar, the Harvest Match program was continued to help match volunteers with locals' ample fruit or nut supplies.
- A new game and a new activity was developed for the WildSafe Ranger program to help deliver key messages to older kids, or children who have experienced the previous presentation already.

The largest highlight of the season was the number of WRP and wildlife presentations that were completed. The participants appreciated the time and information and this will hopefully result in positive changes throughout the community. Some members of the community were unphased by the potential of bears becoming habituated, but were concerned at the thought of increased activity of other species such as rats, skunks and raccoons. The WCC provided a consistent message that managing garbage, compost, pet food and other common attractants will not only help with bears but all wildlife.

The WCC would like to thank program funders, the City of Castlegar, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the Province of British Columbia, the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK), and the Columbia Basin Trust, for their support of this program. The WCC would also like to thank the residents of Castlegar for their support and interest in keeping wildlife wild and communities safe by managing attractants.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Castlegar Program Coverage Area.

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Highlights from the 2023 Season

Display Booths

WildSafeBC held regular booths throughout the City during the season, engaging with a total of 518 people (Table 1). Display booths were held in a variety of locations in an attempt to reach a broader audience (Figure 2).

Table 1. WildSafeBC display booths in Castlegar, 2023.

Venue	Date	Participants (#)
Stanley Humphries	May 8, 2023	19
City Council Chambers	May 9, 2023	33
Sunfest	June 4, 2023	217
Castlegar Farmer’s Market	July 1, 2023	118
City Hall	July 27, 2023	17
Syringa Provincial Park	September 16, 2023	52
Castlegar Famer’s Market	October 14, 2023	62
Total Participants		518



Figure 2. Display booths at the Castlegar Farmer’s Market (left) and Summerfest (right) in 2023

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflicts, how to stay safe around wildlife, and how they can ensure their family secures wildlife attractants around the home. The WCC hosted WRP presentations for the Castlegar Summer Reading Club, the SPCA Summer Camps, various preschools and daycares, as well numerous classes ranging from grade 1 to 7 at Kinnaird Elementary, Robson Community School, and Twin Rivers Elementary. A total of 55 presentations were delivered this season, reaching over 1200

participants (Table 2; Figure 3).

Table 2. WildSafeBC WRP presentations in Castlegar, 2023.

Schools/Organizations	Grade/Age	Participants (#)
Robson Community School	1/2	22
Robson Community School	3/4	24
Robson Community School	4/5	24
Kinnaird Elementary School	6	28
Kinnaird Elementary School	4/5	24
Kinnaird Elementary School	K	18
Kinnaird Elementary School	3/4	23
Kinnaird Elementary School	K/1	20
Kinnaird Elementary School	1/2	22
Kinnaird Elementary School	K	19
Kinnaird Elementary School	3	22
Kinnaird Elementary School	2/3	20
Kinnaird Elementary School	3/4	23
Kinnaird Elementary School	1	22
Kinnaird Elementary School	2	21
Kinnaird Elementary School	5	26
Kinnaird Elementary School	4	26
Kinnaird Elementary School	2	20
Kinnaird Elementary School	5	28
Twin Rivers Elementary	7	27
Twin Rivers Elementary	5	28
Twin Rivers Elementary	3/4	45
Twin Rivers Elementary	1/2	22
Twin Rivers Elementary	5/6/7	48
Twin Rivers Elementary	3/4	21
Twin Rivers Elementary	6	39
Twin Rivers Elementary	2/3/4/5	42
Twin Rivers Elementary	K/1	18
Twin Rivers Elementary	1/2	12
Twin Rivers Elementary	K/1	44
Twin Rivers Elementary	4/5	37
Rou Doudous Daycare	3-5 y/o	8
Blueberry Daycare	4-5 y/o	15
Blueberry Daycare	3-5 y/o	16
Castlegar Scouts	7-12 y/o	22
SPCA	8-12 y/o	15
Castlegar Public Library	4-14 y/o	19
SPCA	8-11 y/o	18

Kinnaird Elementary School	6	27
Kinnaird Elementary School	2	19
Kinnaird Elementary School	1/2	20
Kinnaird Elementary School	2	19
Kinnaird Elementary School	K	18
Kinnaird Elementary School	2/3	25
Kinnaird Elementary School	1	20
Kinnaird Elementary School	3	22
Kinnaird Elementary School	3/4	23
Robson Community School	1/2	23
Robson Community School	2/3	23
Robson Community School	Strong Start	13
Robson Community School	4/5	24
Robson Community School	5/6	22
Robson Community School	6/7	23
Robson Community School	7	25
Brilliant Cultural Centre	2-4 y/o	15
Totals	55	1289



Figure 3. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator delivering WildSafe Ranger presentations in Castlegar, 2023.

Presentations to Community Groups

Wildlife Awareness

The WCC delivered 7 Wildlife Safety and Awareness presentations to 162 participants. The WCC was a guest speaker for three classes at Selkirk College - an international nursing class and two language instruction classes totaling 95 students. Each presentation was held in person and it is noteworthy that almost all of the attendees were newcomers to Canada and not familiar with local

wildlife. Additionally, presentations were also provided to Castlegar Cubs, Scouts and Guide groups, further enhancing the learning of local youth and their parents. There was a large focus on wildlife safety and attractant management (Table 3).

Table 3. Wildlife Awareness presentations in Castlegar, 2023.

Group	Date	# of Participants
Selkirk College International Students	May 15, 2023	15
Selkirk College International Students	September 11, 2023	45
Scouts Presentation	September 18, 2023	18
Cubs Presentation	September 25, 2023	15
International Nursing Students	October 3, 2023	35
Girls Guides Presentation	October 15, 2023	19
Stellar Place	November 25, 2023	15
Total Participants		162

Electric Fencing

An electric fencing workshop was advertised to take place at City Hall Community Forum in collaboration with an experienced Community Coordinator from a neighboring area. Unfortunately only three people enrolled and the workshop was canceled. The neighbouring Community Coordinator held their own electric fence workshop in their program area the following week and made arrangements for these individuals to join virtually.

Bear Spray Workshops

A total of three bear spray workshops took place in Castlegar with a total of 15 participants (Table 4). This is a reduction in numbers from previous years. Two additional dates were selected for bear spray workshops (one in July and one in August), but neither took place as there was no interest expressed or people registered. The WCC advertised these workshops on social media, at booths, and during other community presentations with the offer of delivering the workshop to individual groups at their selected date and time. There were no requests from any interested parties.

Alternatively, the WCC has had ongoing conversation with the Selkirk College Castlegar Campus to provide bear spray training to students in three outdoor focused programs in the spring (reaching approximately 75 – 90 students).

Table 4. Bear Spray Workshops hosted in Castlegar, 2023.

Venue	Date	Participants (#)
RDCK Landfill	May 29, 2023	6
Zinio Park	August 31, 2023	5
City Hall Parking Lot	October 14, 2023	4
Total Participants		15

BC Goes Wild

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. This year, the WCC created an activity to promote campsite safety using educational messaging from WildSafeBC's Bare Camping Program. A fake campsite was erected for kids and their families to explore and identify all the attractants that were left out. The attractants to identify included: a cooler, garbage, cheese whiz, dish soap and dish washing bin, dirty dishes, toothpaste, candy wrapper (in tent), dog food, empty soda can, popsicle sticks, citronella candle and fruit peels. The activity was set up in multiple locations, including Syringa Provincial Park, Kinnaird Park and Twin Rivers School (Figure 4). It was very well received and most participants were able to identify at least one attractant that they previously had not considered.



Figure 4. Fake campsite set-up in Syringa Provincial Park (left) and Kinnaird Elementary (right) for BC Goes Wild in Castlegar, 2023.

Door-to-Door Education

Door-to-door education consisted of visiting residents in their homes, a community-wide mail out, and a written advertisement. Almost 300 door hangers or Black Bear brochures were delivered to residents within and outside of Castlegar city limits (Table 5). Bear smart tips were developed and included in the quarterly utility bill sent to every property owner within Castlegar (Figure 5). Additionally, a full page was included in the City of Castlegar's Curbside Collection Guide, providing residents with information regarding proper cart and attractant management, as well as promoting the Harvest Match program (Figure 5).

Another large educational focus was placed on rats with 110 door hangers and brochures delivered to households. The population of rats is growing in Castlegar and the surrounding areas and requests were made by City Council to target specific locations where there have been numerous concerns this season.

Table 5. Brochures and door hangers distributed in Castlegar and Area, 2023.

Species	Brochures/Door Hangers Distributed (#)
Black Bear	All Castlegar Residents
Black Bear	269
Rats	110

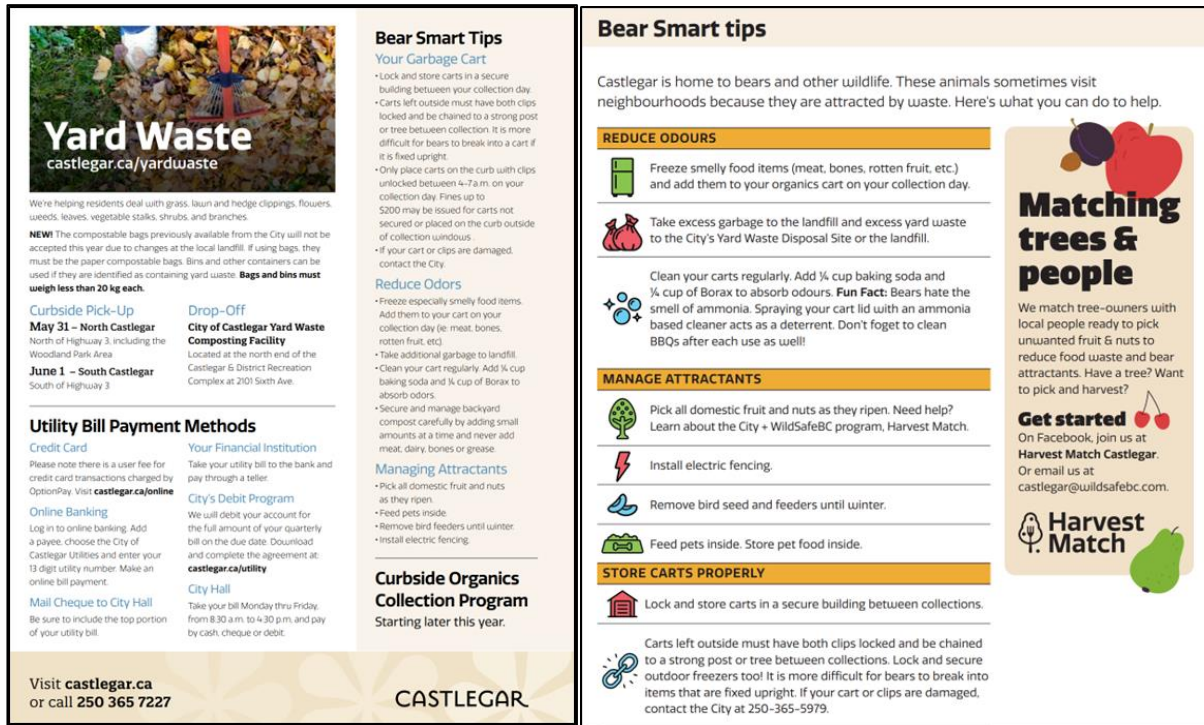


Figure 5. Bear Smart Tips included in the quarterly utility bill (left) and the Curbside Collection Guide (right) to supplement door-to-door public education, Castlegar, 2023.

Bin Tagging

Bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the night before collection. During 24 outings throughout the City of Castlegar, a total of 122 bins were tagged (Table 6). The number of bins that were tagged increased significantly from last year’s numbers when only 28 bins were tagged over 14 outings. Contributing factors for this increase could be the introduction of the new curbside organics collection program. The City hired an Organics Ambassador to help educate the public about proper waste sorting, provide valuable resources, and discuss bin allocation and maintenance, among numerous other tasks. That said, a number of households would place out the organics cart the evening prior to collection but not the garbage cart. Residents may need additional education in understanding that all carts act as a wildlife attractant and need to be locked and secured until the morning of collection, regardless of the contents.

The City continued to issue tickets to the public for placing carts out the night before collection, which is against municipal bylaws. However, fewer tickets were issued this year in consideration

of the new organics program, despite more bins were tagged this year (e.g., 23 tickerts were issued in 2022 and 13 were issued in 2023).

Table 6. Bin Tagging completed in Castlegar and Area, 2023

Evening	Sessions	Bins Tagged
Sunday	5	25
Monday	6	31
Tuesday	6	26
Wednesday	7	40
Total	24	122

The WCC also completed two rounds of commercial dumpster checks of food related businesses and found a total of 36 dumpsters found unlocked or open. These businesses would benefit from increased education from the WildSafeBC Business Pledge program.

Some communities within the RDCK have inconsistent or no municipal garbage collection, including the communities of Raspberry, Brilliant, Robson and Ootischenia. Residents of these communities can hire one of three companies that operate in the area to remove household waste, all with different pickup schedules. The bin tagging program is not suitable for these areas and door-to-door education is recommended.

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. The WCC visited the Pass Creek Campground to discuss the benefits of the BARE Campsite Program early in the season. As in previous years, the manager expressed interest, but was concerned about the cost associated with some of the initiatives. The WCC offered to use Pass Creek Campground as a pilot program for the RDCK to set a strong example for the district, but the Manager was not able to fully commit due to costs. Instead they adopted the practice of having campers sign a declaration upon check-in that they will not leave any attractants out when their site is unattended. The campground also has also installed food lockers to help ensure the safety of campers staying in soft-sided units. Next year, they plan to install a designated kitchen space for campers to keep food prep areas away from sleeping areas. If that is accomplished, the campground will be meeting all of the criteria of the Bare Campsite Program.

WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to adopt practices that will reduce conflict with wildlife to keep their staff and patrons safe and wildlife wild. Through these actions, businesses are setting 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 (subject to budget constraints) and a WildSafeBC Business Pledge poster. No new businesses signed the pledge this year and it is

recommended that the WCC reach out to businesses and advertise this program earlier in the season with consistent follow-up.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page has been an effective way to reach residents. Some of the most popular posts were about wildlife safety tips and attractants. Unfortunately, Meta no longer provides insights on posts that have been shared from other pages, so it was difficult to gain a full understanding on the type of information the community was most interested in. The number of page followers increased by 5% from 800 to 842 in 2023.

The WCC and the City of Castlegar collaborated to create a bear safety informative that was sent out to all Castlegar residents with the quarterly utility bill. The City also collaborated with the WCC to include wildlife attractant education in the Curbside Collection Guide provided to residents. The WCC also competed two radio interviews with Castlegar's local station, The GOAT, to discuss wildlife activity updates as well as support various WildSafeBC initiatives and events.

Fruit Gleaning

The WCC continued to promote the Harvest Match Castlegar program in collaboration with the City of Castlegar. The intent of this program is to connect local residents in search of fruit and nuts to harvest with those who were unable to manage their fruit trees or had an abundance that would otherwise go to waste. This program was very well received by the community. Facebook was used as the primary communication tool; the Harvest Match Castlegar page grew from 86 to 227 followers in 2023.

Members share what fruit/nuts they are hoping to collect or have to offer and private message each other for collection details, including the home owners address, specific timeframes and required materials. Volunteers follow homeowner parameters when collecting the fruit based. The fruit and nuts collected can be used in any capacity – donation, feeding livestock, selling, or personal consumption. Public feedback indicated that individuals would use the “program” again, as well as suggest it to others (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Photos from the Harvest Match program, Castlegar, 2023.

Indigenous Engagement

This season, all WCC's were provided with online training through Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc. on how to effectively work with Indigenous People's. This education proved essential in recognizing and respecting Indigenous culture, as well as taking personal and professional steps towards reconciliation.

The WCC was joined by WCC's from Arrow-Lakes, Nelson, Rossland and Boundary programs to meet with a representative from the Autonomous Sinixt. Here, WCC's gained valuable information about Indigenous engagement, effective stewardship of wildlife and land, and traditional Sinixt culture and language.

Collaborations

Numerous collaborations took place during the 2023 season with WildSafeBC, including:

- Bylaw Officer – Wayne Cox was an active participant in residential and commercial bin tagging this season. Wayne participated in majority of the evenings spent bin tagging.
- The COS contacted the WCC with requests for education and outreach in problem areas. Syringa Provincial Park Elementary – allowed access to the campground to host a Workshop BC Goes Wild event, as well as host an information booth to help promote the Bare Campsite Program (

Figure 7. Canada Day coloring contest prize (left) and Bare Camping activity at Syringa Provincial Park Elementary (right), 2023.

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The City of Castlegar – provided space for the WCC to host information booths at various events through the season, as well as offered to provide a venue at no cost for the (canceled) Electric Fence Workshop. Additionally, they provided various resources as needed to support regular activities and presentations, an example being assistance with the Canada Day coloring contest (

Figure 7. Canada Day coloring contest prize (left) and Bare Camping activity at Syringa Provincial Park Elementary (right), 2023.

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- The City of Castlegar – collaborated on educational efforts by including wildlife safety information in the quarterly utility bill and Curbside Collection Guide sent to all residents.
- The City of Castlegar – collaborated to promote the Harvest Match program and purchased additional “pick me” signs to further support the initiative.
- The WCC Arrow-Slocan Lakes made arrangements to have Castlegar residents virtually join an Electric Fence workshop they were hosting.



Figure 7. Canada Day coloring contest prize (left) and Bare Camping activity at Syringa Provincial Park Elementary (right), 2023.

Challenges and Opportunities

The City of Castlegar experienced a high number of human-bear conflict reports this season. Bears visited the community on a regular basis in efforts to find food. Castlegar continues to have challenges with residents managing attractants that lead to food-conditioned bears. It is strongly suspected that garbage continues to be the leading attractant for black bears in Castlegar, followed by fruit and nut trees. There were steady reports of garbage cart damage this year (Figure 8), especially to the clips and lids. Waste Management repairs damaged carts and has been replacing damaged clips with a more durable option. Previously, there would be no charge for this service, but now homeowners may be charged if it is found that the cart was left unsecured, or if the bin had previously been repaired.



Figure 8. Bear accessed garbage bin observed during bin tagging outings in Castlegar, 2023.

Moving forward, recommendations include a high level of education regarding the new organics collection program, and continued bin tagging. Residents need to understand that all bins act as a wildlife attractant and need to be locked and secured until the morning of collection, even if there are no food items in the bin. This will help reduce the number of human-bear conflicts in the community and putting measures in place will mitigate these concerns. Improper storage of carts leads to high numbers of bear damaged carts and food-conditioned bears. Many of the homes in

the downtown area do not have garages, leaving residents to store garbage outside, often accessible to bears. Some residents effectively chain or strap the bear-resistant bins to posts or trees, but most do not, allowing bears to drag garbage away and rip the bin apart. Issuing tickets to repeat offenders in combination with bin tagging efforts has proven to be an effective way to reduce the number of bins placed curbside prior to 4:00 am. Continued enforcement of proper bin storage is highly recommended, as residents now have two bins to manage.

Ongoing education should continue to inform residents of new programs, initiatives, and how to get bins repaired through the City of Castlegar website, Facebook page, and quarterly utility bills. New residents may be unaware of the bylaws and need easily accessible information.

There is consistent feedback from residents indicating they are reluctant to report instances where bears access garbage or damage property due to fear that the bear will be harmed. Reporting to the COS needs to be encouraged to effectively manage human-wildlife conflict in the community. It is recommended that future WCC's emphasize the goals of the COS in dealing with wildlife conflicts and the mitigation steps they take before an animal is destroyed as a result of preventable conflicts. Clearly communicating the goals and processes of the COS will build public trust and help mitigate this misconception.

There is also a continued reluctance by the public to recognize fruit as an attractant that leads to conflict. Unlike garbage, fruit is perceived as a healthy form of calories while disregarding the fact that a bear has been encouraged to forage among densely populated areas. Once the fruit wanes, these food-conditioned and human-habituated bears may then turn to other sources of nearby food such as garbage. There should also be continued education on replacing fruit or nut-bearing trees with other suitable trees, as well as promotion of Castlegar's Harvest Match program.

The following additional initiatives are recommended for 2024:

- Electric fence demonstration(s) illustrating best practices on resident properties.
- Continue door-to-door campaigns and wildlife in area signage in hotspots.
- Continue public education through radio ads, social media, and quarterly utility bills.
- Follow up with Pass Creek Campground on the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.
- Ensure the continuation of the Wildlife Working Group to facilitate ongoing implementation of Castlegar's Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan.
- Continue WildSafeBC presentations and bear spray workshops at Selkirk College and through other local organizations.
- Initiate the bin tagging program as soon as possible in the active bear season (starting as early as April) and recruit volunteers to assist with this program with appropriate conflict mitigation training. Consistency is key with this program.
- Continue the promotion of the Harvest Match program – particularly with houses that have unmanaged fruit trees or renters that may not be motivated to properly glean the fruit.
- Encourage continued education and enforcement efforts, especially focusing residents and businesses where repeated attractant mismanagement occurs.
- Work with residents to find effective bin storage and security solutions.

- Collaborate with the City of Castlegar to develop an effective strategy to monitor organic bin management.

Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank the City of Castlegar, the Province of BC, the RDCK, the BC Conservation Foundation, and the Columbia Basin Trust for their financial support of this program. Thank you to the local COS; Castlegar Bylaw Officer Wayne Cox; the great staff at City Hall; and the various media outlets for running stories and broadcasts that helped spread the messaging of WildSafeBC. The WCC would also like to thank the community members of Castlegar for their support and readiness to learn about wildlife and attractant management strategies.