

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

Central Okanagan

Prepared by: Jenna Scherger

WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Coordinator



Executive Summary

The 2023 WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Annual Report summarizes the activities and achievements of the WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Program between May 15th and November 30th, 2023. The WildSafeBC Central Okanagan program area covers the communities of Lake Country, Kelowna, West Kelowna, Peachland, and areas serviced by the Regional District of the Central Okanagan (RDCO) curbside collection program (Figure 1). The WildSafeBC Central Okanagan Program respectfully acknowledges that our initiatives and activities took place on the ancestral and unceded traditional territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed various outreach activities with the goal of educating the public about human-wildlife conflicts and promoting human-wildlife coexistence within the communities. A summary of the key program deliverables throughout the 2023 season are as follows:

- 9 WildSafe Ranger Programs delivered as in-class presentations, with 470 youth reached.
- 40 people reached through door-to-door canvassing using door hangers.
- 7 bin tagging routes and a total of 316 bins tagged.
- 2 display booths held at community events and 110 people reached.
- Over 25 Facebook posts with over 6,075 people reached and 36 new followers.
- 5 “Bear in Area” signs deployed.
- No new businesses signed up for the Business Pledge.
- No new campgrounds signed on to the Bare Campsite Program.
- Promotion of the West Kelowna Bear Hazard Assessment.
- Human-cougar conflict brochure development with Conservation Officers and researchers.

Successes this season included the delivery of WildSafe Ranger Programs to nine classes, an 84% success rate in changing resident bin placement behaviour through our bin tagging initiative, promotion of the West Kelowna Bear Hazard Assessment, and generation of a local human-cougar conflict brochure through collaborations with the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service (COS), government, and local researchers. Key collaborations with the COS, City of Kelowna Bylaw, and City of West Kelowna Bylaw helped the WCC prioritize areas that required imminent education outreach on attractant management due to reports of bear activity. Challenges the WCC faced this year included navigating the McDougall Creek Wildfire limiting access within the program area and volunteer engagement.

Thank you to the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the Province of British Columbia, the Regional District of Central Okanagan, the City of West Kelowna, and the District of Peachland for funding this program. The WCC sincerely appreciates the commitment of program volunteers and collaborators for their support.

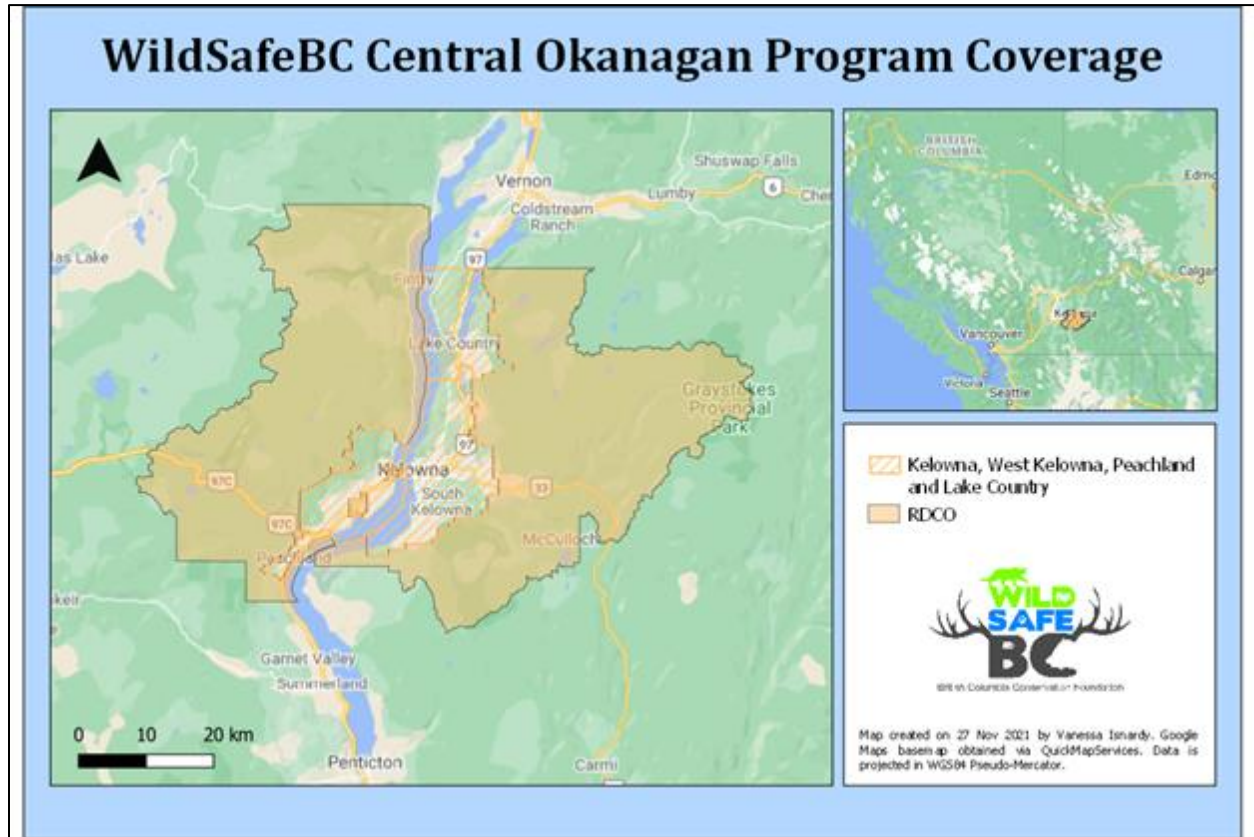


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Central Okanagan coverage area.

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Cover photo: WildSafeBC Okanagan Display Board Setup for Booths.

Highlights from the 2023 Season

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict (Figure 2). The WCC contacted eight elementary schools in the Central Okanagan and four schools in the Okanagan Westside to organize WRP presentations. Of the eight schools in the Central Okanagan, five schools and one organization participated in the WRP with 261 students becoming WildSafe Rangers (Table 1). In the Okanagan Westside, four schools participated in the WRP, with 209 students becoming WildSafe Rangers (Table 1). In total, 470 youth became WildSafe Rangers and each student received a WildSafe Ranger kit, which included black bear and deer brochures, a bookmark, sticker, badge, tattoo, oath card, and an at-home activity book connected to WildSafeBC’s ongoing WildSafe Ranger Colouring Contest (Figure 3).



Figure 2. The WCC gives a WildSafe Ranger Program presentation to Davidson Road Elementary School (left). Examples of wildlife artifacts (e.g., black bear scat, black bear skull, black bear paw imprint, and black bear and grizzly bear claws) the students learn from (right).

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

Region	School/Organization	Grade	Students
Central Okanagan	BCSPCA	K-5	38
Central Okanagan	Glenmore Elementary	3	103
Central Okanagan	The Balsam School	K-1	40
Central Okanagan	South Kelowna Elementary	K-1	37
Central Okanagan	Davidson Road Elementary	1	43
TOTAL			261
Okanagan Westside	Rose Valley Elementary	1-2	74
Okanagan Westside	Shannon Lake Elementary	3	84

Okanagan Westside	Hudson Road Elementary	Strong children and parents	Start and 14 (plus 13 parents)
Okanagan Westside	Peachland Elementary	1/2	37
TOTAL			209



Figure 3. Example of the WildSafe Ranger kit each student received.

Presentations to Community Groups

There were no community presentations in the Central Okanagan or Okanagan Westside this season. However, the WCC provided various condensed versions of bear spray workshops and information on attractant management to interested people at 2 display booths at community events. The condensed bear spray workshops included providing information on recognizing wildlife behaviour, allowing people to hold inert bear spray and understand the mechanisms behind bear spray deployment, and when and how to discharge bear spray using the “[S.P.R.A.Y.](#)” acronym.

Display Booths

The WildSafeBC display booths are a great way to spread knowledge about WildSafeBC and educate the public on wildlife behavior, recreational trail etiquette, responsible use of bear spray, and management of wildlife attractants at home. In the Central Okanagan, the WCC held a display booth at the RDCO’s “Park’s Day” at Bertram Creek Regional Park on July 15th, 2023. At this

event, the WCC reached a total of 20 people. In the Okanagan Westside, the WCC held a display booth at the Peachland Open House at the Peachland Community Centre on June 8th, 2023 (Figure 4). At this event, the WCC reached a total of 90 people. These events provided an opportunity for the WCC to introduce residents and visitors to WildSafeBC messaging and generate connections with local businesses and community organizations involved in each event.



Figure 4. A WildSafeBC display board at the Peachland Open House. Materials at the display booth include a display board (left) and wildlife infographics, artifacts (e.g., scat, skull(s), paw imprints), temporary tattoos, bookmarks, stickers, and wildlife brochures (right).

Display booths provided residents with knowledge of wildlife in the area through infographics and wildlife artifacts such as a black bear skull, cougar skull, black bear and grizzly bear claws and a black bear paw used for educational purposes (Figure 4). Display Booths also featured the popular “Poops n’ Prints” game, where participants match wildlife scat and prints to the respective animal (Figure 5). The game is designed to increase wildlife identification skills and bring awareness to safety practices when recreating in wild areas.



Figure 5. The “Poops n’ Prints” game at the WildSafeBC display booth.

Bin Tagging and Door-to-door Education

Door-to-door education consists of leaving door hangers or other educational materials at residential households or having in-person conversations with residents. Door-to-door education was modified this year to consist of leaving door hangers; the WCC did not knock on doors as has been done in the past. A total of 40 households in the Lake Avenue neighbourhood of Peachland were reached with door hangers.

Bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of solid waste containers set curbside the night before collection. Bin-tagging routes were selected based on reports of bear activity from community members and areas requested by the COS. A total of 316 bins were tagged this year. In the Central Okanagan, there were 3 distinct routes (i.e., 2 routes in Kelowna and 1 route in Lake Country), with a total of 145 bins receiving stickers (Figure 6). In the Okanagan Westside, there were 3 distinct routes and 1 repeated route for a total of 171 bins tagged (Figure 6). For houses included in the repeated route, 10 bins were repeat offenders. Bin tagging was an effective strategy for changing resident behaviour, as supported by the 84% of residents whose bins were tagged during the initial survey did not have their bins at the curb during the second survey (Figure 7).

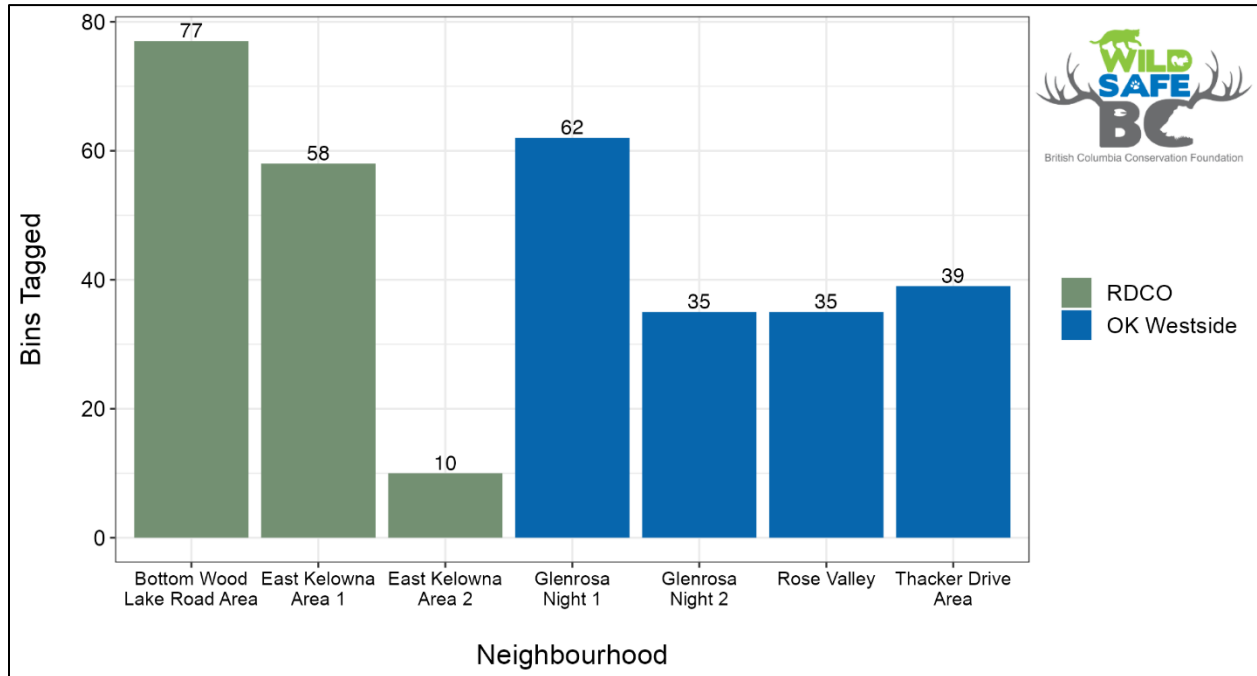


Figure 6. Bar plot showing the total number of bins tagged during each of the 3 distinct routes in the RDCO (green; left) and the 2 distinct routes and 1 repeated route in the Okanagan Westside (blue; right). The total number of bins tagged for each route are depicted at the top of each column.

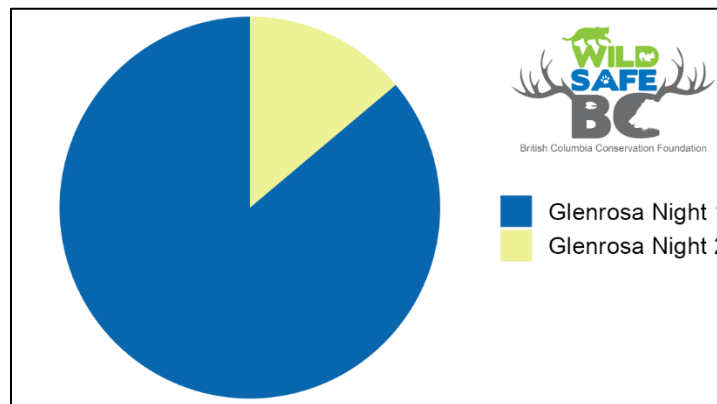


Figure 7. Pie chart depicting the change in behaviour of 84% of residents following bin tagging. The blue region represents the total number of bins tagged in the Glenrosa area of the Okanagan Westside during the first bin tagging night (n = 62) and the yellow region presents the total number of repeat offenders during the second bin tagging night (n = 10).

The WCC also maintained a previously established partnership with the City of Kelowna Bylaw Department to send out education letters to all Kelowna residents observed on first passes to have garbage bins placed out the night before collection day. The City of Kelowna sent out a total of 68 letters to residents and the City of West Kelowna sent out a total of 171 letters.

Public Inquiries

The WCC received public inquiries via phone and email. This season, the WCC received a total of 68 public inquiries about food-conditioned wildlife, habituated wildlife, general wildlife activity, the WildSafeBC program, and bin tagging (Figure 8). Most public inquiries involved reports of black bear activity and questions about the bin tagging program.

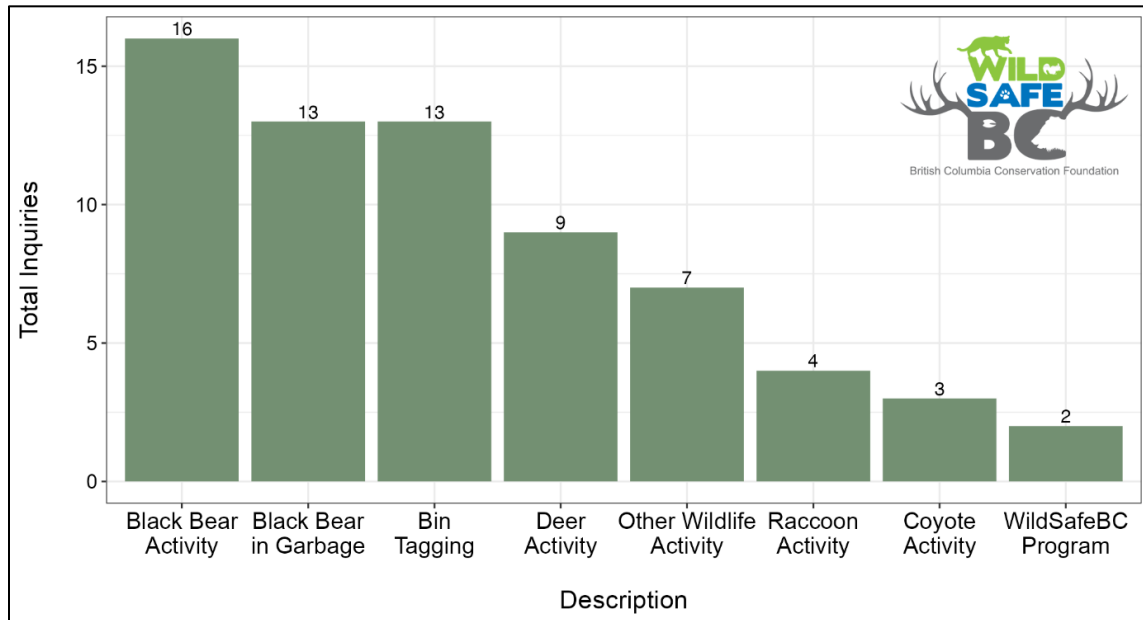


Figure 8. Bar plot showing the total number of public inquiries (n=68) to the WCC by description of the inquiry. The total number of inquiries per description is depicted at the top of each respective bar.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Central Okanagan page has been an effective way to reach residents and grew 4.25% in 2023 from 891 to 927 followers. Over 25 posts were created and reached over 5,875 people. The posts with the highest reach were with respect to alerting residents of wildlife activity in neighbourhoods (Figure 9). The posts with the highest engagement involved topics around bear safety and activity. For urgent posts, such as those regarding current wildlife activity in neighbourhoods, the WCC collaborated community sponsors to share the posts to their social media pages.

WildSafeBC Central Okanagan
 Oct 3 · 🌐

Bear in Area Alert for [District of Lake Country](#) near Forest Hills Drive.

There have been reports of a bear frequenting the neighbourhood.

For the safety of both the bears and residents in the area, it is imperative that residents clean up unnatural food sources in their yards and secure garbage bins in a shed or garage until the morning of your scheduled collection day (Monday).

If you do not have a shed or garage and are struggling to manage the attractants in your yard, please reach out and I would be happy to schedule a meeting to discuss how we can help make your yard bear safe.

Access to unnatural food sources can lead to food-conditioned bears and potential habituation towards people, resulting in risk to public safety and destruction of the bears.

In addition to securing your garbage bins, please remove any other potential bear attractants from your yard. Other attractants include bird feeders, unmaintained fruit trees, pet food, and fridges/freezers. For a full list of bear attractants and more information on attractant management please visit <https://wildsafebc.com/species/black-bear/> and click on the "Conflict Reduction" tab.

Please continue to report any sightings or conflict with bears in urban areas to the Conservation Officer Service at 1-877-952-7277.

CAUTION

BEAR IN AREA

Keep Garbage Secure Until Collection Day

Do Not Feed or Approach Wildlife **Keep Pets Leashed and Under Control** **Keep Fruit Trees Picked**

WILD SAFE BC
British Columbia Conservation Foundation

Report any conflicts with wildlife to the Conservation Officer Service reporting line at **1-877-952-7277**

www.wildsafebc.com

Figure 9. Example of a Facebook post alerting residents in a Lake Country neighbourhood of bear activity.

Monitoring local community Facebook pages within the program area helped gain valuable insight on wildlife activity in different neighbourhoods. Pictures and videos of wildlife posted on social media helped inform the WCC about wildlife location, behaviour, and number of individuals.

The WCC submitted a [joint press release with the RDCO](#) about the managing attractants that was well received. This press release generated several phone calls and leads for further education opportunities across the RDCO. The WCC also submitted a [joint press release with the City of West Kelowna](#) to promote the Bear Hazard Assessment and requested community members complete the related survey.

Wildlife in Area Signs

“Wildlife in Area” signs are placed in areas within communities experiencing wildlife activity throughout the season. The WCC worked closely with program sponsors to deploy wildlife in area signage in 5 areas, particularly in relation to black bears. Once black bear activity was confirmed in an area (e.g., through multiple sightings and reports), the WCC requested that the program sponsors place signage to alert residents of a black bear in the area (Figure 10). Along with the deployment of signs, the WCC updated social media with information including the number of

black bears, neighbourhood of interest, and a reminder to securely manage attractants and respective scheduled collection days (Figure 9).



Figure 10. A “Bear in Area Sign” deployed in West Kelowna.

Collaborations

Community collaborations are essential to the WildSafeBC Program. The WCC continued to support strata and community associations who were interested in addressing and preventing human-wildlife conflict. In 2023, the WCC worked with a stratum to provide education about raccoons through a site visit, providing relevant attractant management information, and safety tips. Over the season, the WCC worked closely with the COS to focus outreach efforts on target areas based on reports of frequent black bear and deer activity. A new collaboration between the WCC, COS, government biologists, and cougar researchers was created to mitigate cougar-livestock interactions in the area. This collaboration is ongoing with the goal of developing a human-cougar conflict brochure for the Central Okanagan.

WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to set 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. No new businesses were approached or participated in the program in 2023 and this should be prioritized in future years.

WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

WildSafeBC's Bare Campsite Program has been developed to support campground operators with resources and training in order to reduce conflicts with bears and other wildlife at their

facilities. Through the Bare Campsite Program, WildSafeBC can 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 in 2023 and this should be a priority for future years.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC participated in Indigenous Corporate Training this season and completed the Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples online workshop. Unfortunately, the WCC was new to the program this year and was unable to make the appropriate connections to further engagement in the area. However, Indigenous engagement and awareness of the Indigenous Nations in the Central Okanagan should continue to be a focus for future program seasons.

Special Initiatives

BC Goes Wild is a celebration of the diverse wildlife that inhabits British Columbia. BC Goes Wild is promoted annually during the month of September, which coincides with when human-bear conflicts typically increase. Unfortunately, due to the McDougall Creek Fire, the WCCs' display booth event for BC Goes Wild was cancelled. However, the WCC increased their bin tagging initiatives and social media presence to share knowledge of BC wildlife and promote the [BC Goes Wild Colouring Contest](#) during the month of September.

This season, the WCC collaborated with the City of West Kelowna to assist with collecting data on the [West Kelowna Bear Hazard Assessment](#) (BHA). The WCC attended meetings and promoted the West Kelowna BHA survey on social media from August 15th to October 2nd, 2023 (Figure 11). The goal of the survey was to hear peoples' thoughts about human-bear interactions in West Kelowna. Results from the survey will be used to understand peoples' perceptions about bears to inform the BHA and help identify current and potential risks that influence human-bear conflict. Once completed in 2024, the BHA will identify bear travel corridors, non-natural food sources (e.g., garbage, fruit trees, and livestock), and areas that are at high risk for human-bear conflict in West Kelowna.

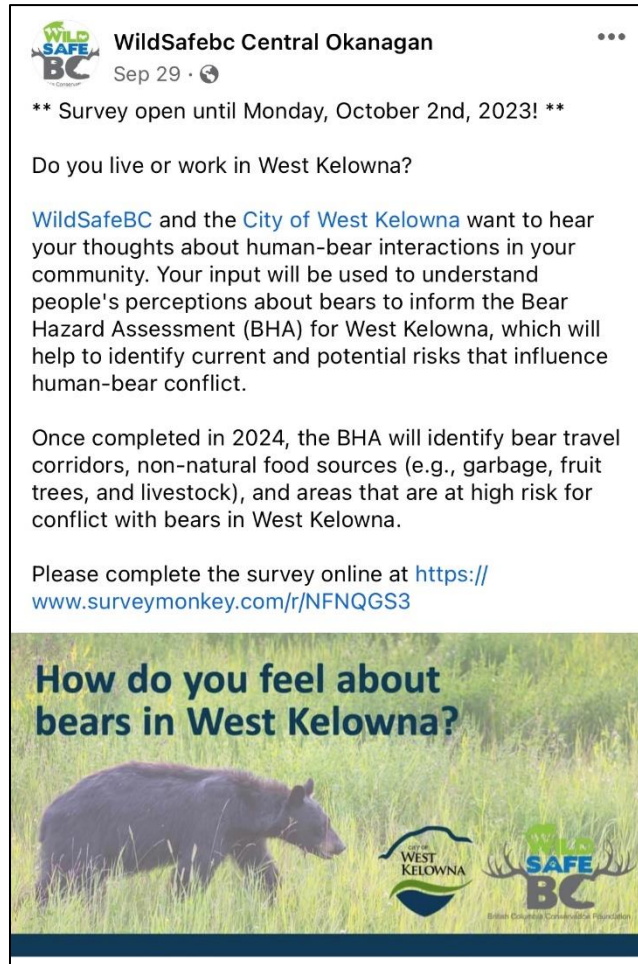


Figure 11. An example of a Facebook post used to promote the West Kelowna BHA.

Challenges and Opportunities

The Central Okanagan and Okanagan Westside experienced a high number of human-bear conflict reports this season. The McDougall Creek Wildfire in West Kelowna may have impacted bear activity during the late summer with a higher number of reports received by the WCC from the COS and the public. The region continues to have challenges with resident’s irresponsibly managing attractants, such as garbage and fruit trees, leading to food-conditioned bears. Further, the WCC struggled to find volunteers to participate in educational activities, such as bin tagging and door-to-door canvassing throughout the season.

Moving forward, recommendations include considering the impact of irresponsible attractant management on human-wildlife conflicts in the community and supporting measures to mitigate these concerns. Residents have expressed interest in the implementation of bear-resistant carts. However, improper storage of carts (e.g., bear-resistant or not) results in high numbers of bear-damaged carts and subsequent food-conditioned bears. Many houses in the region do not have garages or sheds, resulting in residents storing garbage bins outside and accessible to wildlife. While some residents effectively chain or strap their garbage bins to posts or trees, most do not.

Having garbage bins easily accessible results in food-conditioned bears frequenting neighbourhoods and increases human-bear conflict. Continued enforcement of proper bin security is highly recommended as it has been proven to be effective.

Further, it is recommended to increase education on replacing fruit or nut-bearing trees with other suitable trees and educate residents on relevant bylaws. New residents of the different cities may be unaware of the bylaws and require easily accessible information. Ongoing education should continue to inform residents of new programs or initiatives to promote human-wildlife coexistence.

There should be continued education on responsible attractant management, including garbage, fruit trees, and livestock. The following additional initiatives are recommended for 2024:

- Electric fence demonstration(s) for fruit trees and livestock protection.
- Engage food banks and other non-profits for fruit gleaning.
- Connect residents through social media food sharing group.
- Increased door-to-door campaigns and wildlife in area signage in hotspots.
- Continue education through social media.
- Establish relationship with realtors to develop human-wildlife conflict and coexistence kits when people buy a home in the Okanagan.
- Continue the WRP to youth.
- Collaboration with the University of British Columbia Okanagan or RDCO summer students to increase volunteer engagement early in the season.
- Initiate the bin-tagging and door-to-door canvassing programs as soon as the WCC season begins and attempt to recruit volunteers to assist with this program with appropriate conflict mitigation training.
- Encourage continued education and enforcement efforts.
- Work with residents to find effective bin security solutions.
- Incorporate language in the current West Kelowna Solid Waste Bylaw that is consistent with other jurisdictions in the Central Okanagan. The bylaw would add weight to education efforts and should require residents to manage wildlife attractants in a manner that makes them inaccessible to wildlife. This includes keeping bins secure and inaccessible to wildlife outside of collection hours on the day of the scheduled pick up.

Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank the City of West Kelowna, District of Peachland, the RDCO, the Province of British Columbia, and the BC Conservation Foundation for their financial support of this program. Thank you to the local Conservation Officers, Ken Owens, Hailey Gooliaff, and Glen Small; Kelowna Bylaw Officer Morgan Heighes, West Kelowna Bylaw Officers, Mike Cain and Trish Robertson; the staff at West Kelowna City Hall; and the dedicated volunteers: TJ Gooliaff, Mackenzie Askin, and Mikaela Francis. The WCC would also like to thank the community members of the Central Okanagan for their support and readiness to learn about keeping wildlife wild and communities safe through responsible management of their attractants.