

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

Cowichan Valley

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Executive Summary

In 2023, the WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley program entered its seventh year. This report describes the activities of WildSafeBC in the Cowichan Valley from May 15th to November 30th, 2023. WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley acknowledges that it operates on the unceded traditional territories of the Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Malahat First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, and Stz'uminus First Nation. The program covers the communities of Chemainus, Duncan, Cowichan Lake, Youbou, Cobble Hill, Malahat and Shawnigan Lake.

As a large geographical region (Figure 1), education through door-to-door activities, presentations, and information tables were focused on hotspot areas of bear conflict. Black bears attracted to garbage generated the highest number of calls to the BC Conservation Officer Service (COS) in the Cowichan Valley. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community. The 2023 activities included the WildSafeBC Ranger Program, Bear Spray workshops, information booths at public events such as Canada Day, Malahat Day, and Youbou Regatta, going door-to-door with volunteers and Wildlife Safety Respond Officers and canvassing areas with wildlife activity with informative signs, posters and brochures. Specific deliverables for the 2023 season include:

- Over 500 elementary students learned about bear and cougar safety through 5 WildSafeBC Rangers Programs.
- 2 community presentations reaching over 120 people.
- 220 households reached through door-to-door activities with over 32 in-person conversations.
- 3 community events engaging 225 residents across the Cowichan Valley
- 18 Facebook posts on the WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley Facebook page, increasing the following by 75 followers to 852.
- 10 wildlife signs in the area and 13 posters placed in wildlife hotspots.
- 6 bins tagged over multiple bin tagging sessions.

WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley would not be possible without the support of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), Municipality of North Cowichan (MNC), Town of Lake Cowichan, Island Return-It, the Province of British Columbia, and British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Looking towards 2024, the main goal is to educate the general public across the Cowichan Valley about wildlife safety and to change perception of what human-wildlife conflict is and how to minimize conflict. This education can be accomplished by reaching new people through the WildSafe Ranger Program, community events, online presentations, and door-to-door activities. Through education, collaboration and community solutions, we can keep wildlife wild and communities safe.

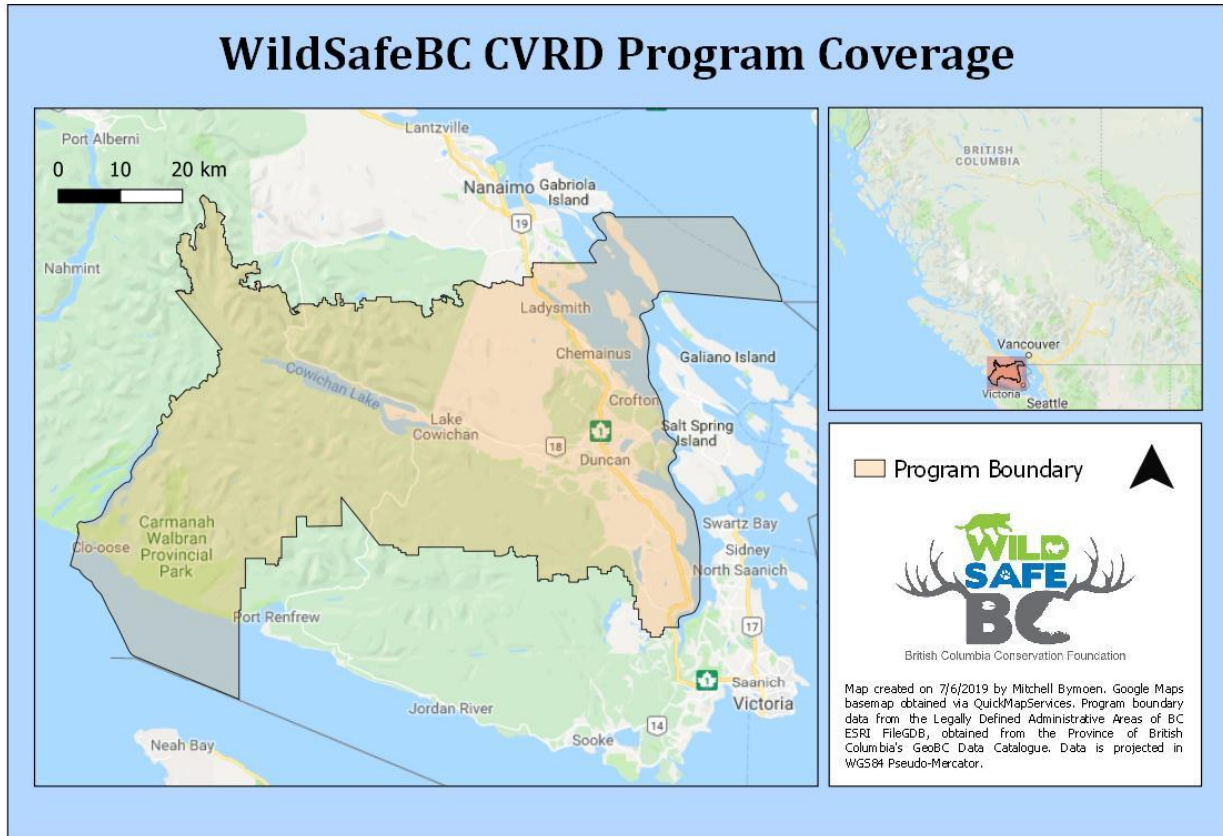


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley program coverage area.

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Highlights from the 2023 Season

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces students to the concept of human-wildlife conflict and encourages them to take an active role in reducing human-wildlife conflict at home by educating them about identifying backyard wildlife attractants. WildSafeBC offers in-person (Figure 2) and online WRP presentations. There were four schools and the Cowichan Community Center that participated in in-person WRP through indoor and outdoor presentations. Approximately 500 students became WildSafe Rangers (Table 1) and received kits that included a WildSafe Ranger colouring book, pin, sticker, tattoo, and card.



Figure 2. WildSafeBC WildSafe Ranger Program presentation set up for 2023.

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

School/Group	Grade	No. of Classes	Students
Cowichan Community Center	K-3	1	21
St-John Academy at Camp Pringle	9,10	2	115
Evergreen Independent	K-7	4	72
Cowichan Lake Elementary	4-9	10	263
Ladysmith Primary School	K1,1	5	104
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS		22	575

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC provided two presentations to community groups, reaching over 120 people. First, WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley was a guest speaker at the Duncan community center. A Bear Spray workshop and wildlife safety and awareness presentation was also conducted at the Cowichan River Bible Camp with approximately 100 students and 20 adults. Community group presentation should be a focus for future WildSafeBC goals, Community group presentations is a great way to reach out to the members of the community and educate valuable safety tips and

signs to look out for when out in the community for wildlife and ways to help avoid human and wildlife conflict.

Display Booths

WildSafeBC hosted display booths (Figure) with information tables at 3 community events, reaching 345 people (Table 2). Display booths features educational and interactive learning materials for children and adults to teach the public about human-wildlife conflict prevention (Figure).



Figure 3. WildSafeBC provided public engagement services at several events throughout CVRD in 2023

Table 2. WildSafeBC information booths in the Cowichan Valley in 2022.

Events	Date	Visits
Chemainus Canada Day	July 1 st , 2023	150
Youbou Regatta	August 12, 2023	120
Malahat Day	August 17 th , 2023	75
Total		345



Figure 4. Comparing hands to a black bear paw at the WildSafeBC display booth

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education in high-risk neighborhoods where bears are already habituated is an excellent method of reaching affected households and changing resident's behaviors.

When residents were away from home, the WCC, Wildlife Response Safety Officers (WRSO) and a volunteer dropped an information package including brochures (black bears, cougar, deer) and a letter identifying attractants and potential fines. During the fall season, the WCC worked alongside the COS in the Cowichan area to identify and canvass areas. The WCC also worked closely with the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WRSOs to identify high priority areas for canvassing, including areas with significant reports of black bear activity.

Through door-to-door education, the WCC reached over 200 households, including 32 in-person conversations and over 220 information packages delivered to homes (Table 3).

Table 3. Door-to-door education delivered in different high priority areas in the Cowichan Valley in 2023.

Community	Brochures	Door Hanger	In-person Conversations	Households Visited
Lake Cowichan	40	37	5	37
South Shawnigan Lake	56	56	11	56
North Shawnigan Lake	74	74	3	74
Cobble Hill	30	30	10	30
Crofton/Chemainus	20	20	3	20
Total	220	210	32	217

Bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of solid waste containers set curbside the day before collection (Figure 5). The WCC combined bin tagging with door-to-door education with assistance from local WRSO. During 6 the door to door outings, a total of 8 bins were tagged throughout the CVRD. Areas that were canvassed more than once found no repeat bins tagged; However, the WCC observed some residents do not properly store

their garbage and compost bins in a secure area between collection days, which remains an ongoing issue.



Figure 5. Bins placed at the curb the night before collection received a tag, Cowichan Valley, 2023.

Wildlife in Area Signage

Wildlife in Area signs (Figure 6) are placed in areas of reported wildlife activity or in wildlife activity hotspots. This season, 10 signs were placed throughout the Cowichan Valley with most relating to black bear activity. The WCC also strategically placed 13 educational posters to inform people of different local wildlife attractants across the Cowichan Valley.



Figure 6. A WildSafeBC "bear in area" sign in popular hiking trail in Cobble Hill area

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley page grew in 2023 from 852 to 873 page followers. A total of 18 educational Facebook posts were shared on the page. Facebook posts educated the public

about a number of topics, including BC Goes Wild, wildlife collision presentations, and wildlife safety tips.

Special Initiatives

In September, WildSafeBC celebrates its annual BC Goes Wild event throughout the province. The timing coincides with the weeks of highest human-bear conflicts in BC. The WCC planned to celebrate BC Goes Wild with a bear spray demonstration due to high bear activity in the Cowichan Valley community, but had to cancel due to scheduling and lack of interest from the community. The WCC did promote WildSafeBC's annual photo contest as part of BC Goes Wild on social media.

Collaborations

WildSafeBC is grateful for all the help and support it has received from the funding partners and the organizations that have collaborated to address human-wildlife conflicts this season. This season, the WCC worked closely with WRSOs and the COS. Having communication with WRSOs and the COS has been a great help in identifying specific areas with wildlife and human conflicts and prioritizing areas within the community to canvas for educational efforts. The WCC was also invited to observe the COS and WRSOs transporting two black bears from Duncan to North Island Wildlife Recovery Center in November 2023 (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The British Columbia Conservation Officer Service (COS) and Wildlife Response Safety Officers (WRSOs) transporting two black bears from Duncan to North Island Wildlife Recovery Center, November 2023

Bare Campsite Program

Through the Bare Campsite Program, WildSafeBC provides clear guidelines and resources to assist campgrounds operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. No

campsites joined the program in 2023, but the WCC provided education about the program to 10 people during the 2023 season.

Indigenous Engagement

WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley the following activities to increase Indigenous awareness and engagements:

- Malahat Day: WildSafeBC had the privilege of being invited to participate in setting up a display booth for Malahat First Nations Day.
- Boidiverse BC: Natural History: Bridging, Braiding and Weaving; Indigenous Science & Western Approaches lecture hosted by Royal BC Museum with guest speakers including Snuneymuxw Elder Geraldine Manson, Museum Curator of Entomology Joel Gibson and Collection Manager of Invertebrates Hugh MacIntosh.
- Indigenous Awareness Training Completed.

Challenges and Opportunities

The WildSafeBC program is continually evolving and finding new ways to educate the public. Household waste continues to be the largest source of attractants in the Cowichan Valley reported to the COS. The region covered by the WCC has five systems and schedules of waste removal, with all but one of these regions serviced by municipal collection. Areas that have private waste collection (i.e., Mill Bay, Shawnigan Lake and Cobble Hill) faced challenges with inconsistent pick-up times, which led to bin tagging efforts being inconsistent. Door-to-door education in combination with bin tagging was used to reach these areas the most effectively. New areas were covered when canvassing in 2023 by leaving information packages and also engaging residents in conversation.

Another challenge to waste collection is early placement of bins and proper storage of the bins between collection days. Areas serviced by the CVRD are under the regional bylaw to store waste in a wild-safe manner and to place on the curb after 5am on collection morning. In past years, bin tagging has been an excellent way to educate residents about early curbside placement, however municipal bylaws with enforcement would also go a long way to address this issue. This season, door-to-door education was performed in high conflict areas identified by the COS and WRSOs. To address the issue of waste storage and removal in the community, the following WildSafeBC initiatives should continue in 2024:

- Continue education campaign focusing on the wildlife conflict prevention and solutions through WildSafe Rangers, social media, news articles, and presentations.
- Increase presence at community events and information tables in popular spots around the valley.
- Increased door-to-door and bin tagging campaigns in hotspots.

The WCC also faced challenged with the Business Pledge Program. Reaching out to local businesses and taking the Business Pledge Program proved to be a challenge via email with

limited responses. The WCC recommends reaching out to local businesses for our Business Pledge Program earlier in the season and in person instead of via email.

Another challenge in the Cowichan Valley is many wildlife conflicts are underreported to the COS in the Cowichan Valley. After monitoring social media, the WCC has determined many people post about wildlife conflict and are reluctant to report. Continued education about when and why to phone the COS, renewed door-to door canvassing and expanding social media presence will change beliefs about reporting wildlife conflict.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, the WCC would like to thank the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Municipality of North Cowichan, the Town of Lake Cowichan, Island Return-It, the Province of BC, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for sponsoring WildSafeBC in the Cowichan Valley.

The WCC also appreciates the assistance of Sgt. Scott Norris, Sgt. Stuart Bates, Officer Mark Kissinger, and Officer Robin Sano from the BC Conservation Officer Service, Ilse Saraday, from the CVRD, Shawn Chadburn from the MNC. Lastly, thank you to all the residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties and learn more about our local wildlife. Let's continue to keep wildlife wild and our communities safe!