

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

## Rossland

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## Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Rossland Program between May 15 and November 30, 2023. This program covers the City of Rossland (Figure 1). WildSafeBC acknowledges that this area is within the traditional and unceded territory of the Sinixt Peoples and strives to work collaboratively and respectfully with all Indigenous Nations “to keep wildlife wild and our communities safe”.

Human-Wildlife Conflict Reports (HWCR) received via the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service (COS) indicated sightings and interactions with mostly black bears as well as one grizzly bear. Other wildlife such as coyotes, raccoons and ground squirrels were discussed with residents.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community. In total, the WCC reached approximately 550 people through a variety of activities. The following list summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the 2023 season:

- 14 WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) presentations to 225 youth.
- 3 presentations given to community groups reached 33 participants.
- In-person door-to-door visits reached 47 individuals and 21 door hangers were placed.
- 4 display booths reached more than 200 people.
- 33 Facebook posts and 78 new followers from January 1st to November 30<sup>th</sup> 2023.
- Received and followed up on 16 Human-Wildlife Conflict Reports (HWCR) reports from the BCCOS and received 8 reports from the Rossland bylaw officer and followed up on 4 of these reports.
- Discussed Bare Camping program with the only campground in Rossland, but they did not sign on this year.

Key challenges throughout the year included low reporting of incidents to the BCCOS by the public, lack of access to household bear-resistant waste receptacles, inconsistent trash pickup times, improper management of garbage between collection days by residents, unmanaged, mismanaged and unsecured fruit trees attracting wildlife into city limits, and food-conditioned bears breaking into homes.

The community of Rossland continued pursuing Bear Smart Community designation through the Rossland Bear Smart Task Force with support from WildSafeBC. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help keep wildlife wild and our community safe.

WildSafeBC thanks the City of Rossland, the BC Conservation Foundation, Columbia Basin Trust, and the Province of British Columbia for funding this program.

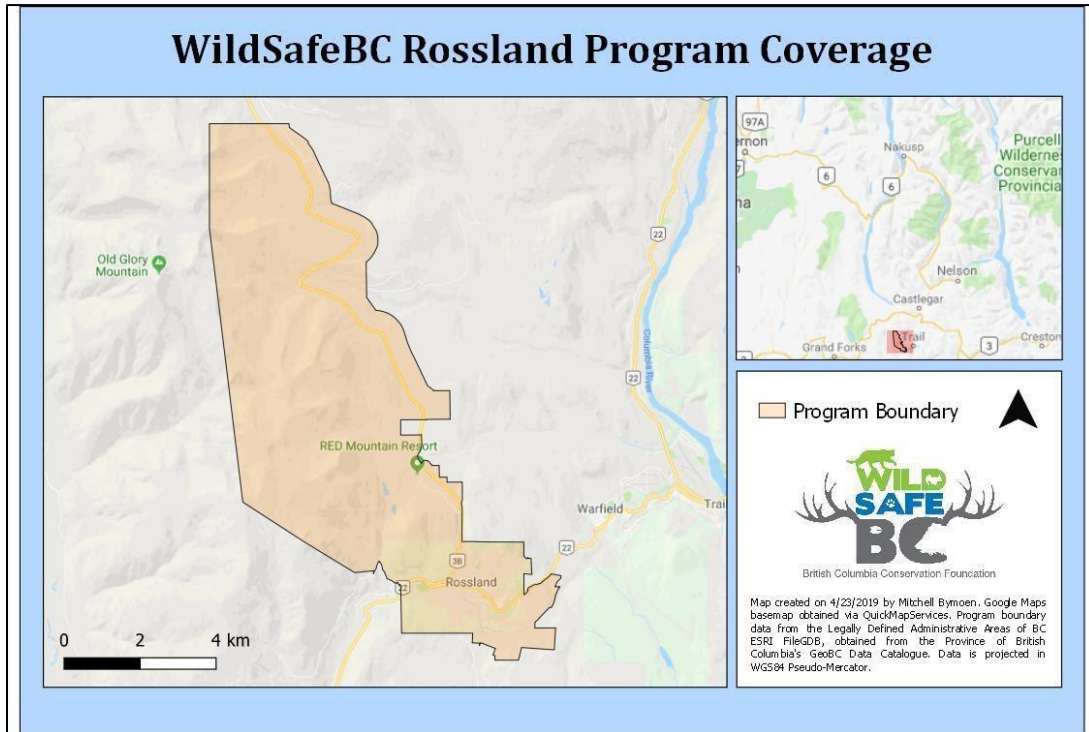


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Rossland program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: WildSafeBC Community Coordinator, Sue Wrigley, hosting a WildSafeBC display booth at a community event, 2023.

## Highlights from the 2023 Season

### Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the COS through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) or online form (<https://forms.gov.bc.ca/environment/rapp/>) were forwarded to the WCC when the COS thought that education would help. There were 52 reports made to the local COS; of those 52 reports, 16 were forwarded to the WCC (Table 1). The WCC followed-up on all 16 reports with education. Further, the WCC received 8 reports from the Rossland bylaw officer and followed up on 4 of these reports.

**Table 1. Human-Wildlife Conflict Reports made to the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service and forwarded to WildSafeBC.**

Complaint	Date	Area
Bear trying to access outdoor freezer	May 5	Lower Rossland - Nevada
Sow and 2 cubs huffing in yard	May 24	Drakes / Lower Spokane
Bear accessing unsecured dumpster and tested a sliding door	May 30	Paradise Mtn Mobile Homes
Yearling damaged shed door to try to access garbage	June 6	Mid-Rossland - Columbia
Possible orphaned cub – updated to previous call – actually a yearling	June 6	Mid-Rossland - Columbia
Bear accessed garbage on garbage day	June 28	Redstone
Bear tried to access a car	Aug 19	Red Mtn
Sow and 2 cubs accessed garbage on garbage day	Aug 31	Redstone
Bear tried to access house – tore screen door	Sept 2	Upper Rossland - Cooke
Bear accessed garbage on garbage day	Sept 7	Lower Rossland - Victoria
Neighbour reported unmanaged fruit	Sept 10	Mid-Rossland – First
Bear trying to access garbage in shed – tore siding	Sept 13	Upper Rossland – Cooke
Bear accessed car – small amount of damage	Sept 17	Lower Rossland - Victoria
Bear accessed unsecured dumpster	Sept 21	Paradise Mtn Mobile Homes
Bear accessed garbage	Sept 25	Upper Rossland - Park
Sow and 2 cubs accessed garbage	Oct 2	Lower Rossland - Spokane

### WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict and engages them in ideas around the importance of respecting wildlife and managing attractants to help “keep wildlife wild and communities safe”. All three schools in Rossland (nine classes) and five summer camps participated in the WRP during the 2023 season (Table 2; Figure 2; Figure 3). A total of 225 youth became WildSafe Rangers and received WRP materials to take home and share with their families.

**Table 2. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2023.**

School / Camp	Participants	Ages	Date
Ecole des Sept Sommets, Rossland	20	Grades K-3	June 12
Ecole des Sept Sommets, Rossland	18	Grades 4-7	June 12
Ecole des Sept Sommets, Rossland	7	Grades 8-9	June 12
Rossland Recreation Summer Camp	13	Ages 5-12	July 31
Rossland Recreation Summer Camp	13	Ages 5-12	July 31
Rossland Museum Summer Camp	14	Ages 5-12	July 26
Rossland Museum Summer Camp	14	Ages 5-12	Aug 2
Rossland Museum Summer Camp	15	Ages 5-12	Aug 22
Rossland Summit School	20	Grade 2/3	Sept 28
Rossland Summit School	22	Grade 2/3	Oct 6
Rossland Summit School	20	Grade K/1	Oct 12
Rossland Summit School	21	Grade 2	Oct 12
Rossland Summit School	22	Grade 1/2	Oct 12
Seven Summits School	6	Grade 8-9	Nov 6
Total participants:	225		



**Figure 2. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator using the WRP storyboard during a Rossland Museum Summer Camp. Photo credit: S. Ford**



**Figure 3. The WCC discussing animal skulls during a WildSafe Ranger Program. Photo: B. Nutini**

## Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC provided three presentations on Wildlife Safety and Awareness and the use of Bear Spray which cumulatively reached 33 community members (Table 3). Participants were able to gain understanding of local wildlife and wildlife behaviour patterns which generated some lively and valuable discussions. The participants were also given the opportunity to practice handling and deploying bear spray and other deterrent techniques, to prepare for the unlikely but potential event of having a negative interaction with wildlife.

**Table 3. WildSafeBC community presentations in 2023.**

Venue	Participants	Date
<b>Rossland Museum Summer Camp staff</b>	7	June 24
<b>Bear Spray Workshop, Rossland (Museum)</b>	6	July 27
<b>Bearfest event</b>	20	Sept 16
<b>Total participants:</b>	<b>33</b>	

## Display Booths

The WCC was able to engage with more than 200 participants through display booths at events (Table 3) which provided an opportunity for the WCC to introduce both tourists and residents to WildSafeBC messaging, make connections with local businesses and community organizations, and learn from locals about local wildlife conflicts. A booth was attempted at Nancy Green Provincial Park, but wildfire smoke was bad and there was no-one at the lake on the day when BC Parks had given permission to do a booth.

**Table 4. WildSafeBC community display booths in 2023.**

Venue	Participants	Date
<b>Canada Day at Rossland Museum</b>	60	July 1
<b>Fall Fair at Rossland Arena</b>	96	Sept 9
<b>Bearfest event at Rossland Miners Hall</b>	27	Sept 10
<b>Rossland Arts &amp; Culture Fair at Rossland Museum</b>	30	Sept 23
<b>Total participants:</b>	<b>213</b>	

## Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

With door-to-door canvassing efforts, the WCC had in-person conversations with over 50 residents and 21 door hangers were left at homes where residents were not available to discuss issues and ask questions in person. The areas that were prioritized for the door-to-door canvassing sessions this year were those that had recent wildlife sightings and or conflicts forwarded by the COS.

Many of these conversations averaged 20 minutes in length, but proved very valuable. Discussions mainly centred on bear sightings, bear behaviour, how to manage a bear encounter,

how to manage attractants and residents' concerns about garbage and organics management in Rossland. The WCC also met with the chair of the Seniors Centre to discuss WSBC's goals and methods for keeping wildlife wild and communities safe.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable sticker on top of containers set curbside the evening before garbage collection. Over the last few years, it has been noted that very few to no bins were put out on the curb ahead of time, so it was decided that bin-tagging is not a worthwhile effort in Rossland this season.

## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Rossland-Trail page gained 78 new followers in 2023 and had 33 Facebook posts during the season. Posts that were popular with page followers were mainly those about special events. The WCC also shared posts on the local Rossland Talks Facebook page, engaged in many discussions there about bear behaviour and attractants and published one article in the Rossland Telegraph.

## Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife in Area signs are installed in areas with higher levels of conflict. Placement of signs is usually followed up with some door-to-door canvassing within the same area. One sign was placed in at the Redstone Golf Course in June following reports of a black bear sow and two cubs regularly visiting a cherry tree close to the clubhouse.

## Collaborations

WildSafeBC Rossland/Trail continued its collaboration with the COS, including regular discussions and joint efforts in identifying areas to focus on for public education. The WCC also collaborated with the City of Rossland Bylaw Officer, who forwarded information on neighbourhoods identified for canvassing and public concern. The WCC also collaborated closely with the Bear Smart Task Force (BSTF).

## WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to become examples in their community for how to safely co-exist with wildlife. To take the WildSafeBC Business Pledge, a business is required to follow best practices in solid waste management, provide adequate training to staff and support the WildSafeBC safety and conflict reduction information. In return, WildSafeBC provides ongoing support to the business in the form of staff training, WildSafeBC materials (subject to budget constraints) and a WildSafeBC Business pledge poster. No businesses signed up for the Business Pledge in 2023.

## WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

Through the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program, WildSafeBC provides clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. The WCC reached out to the manager of the Rossland Lions Community Campground



(the only campground within City limits) and discussed the Bare Campsite program. There was initial interest, and the WCC followed up a few times and left “Bare Camping” information brochures for the campground occupants, but the campground did not sign up for the program.

## Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC attended the Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. “Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples” course and then coordinated a meeting between the regional WCCs (Arrow-Slocan Lakes, Nelson, Castlegar, Grand Forks and Rossland) with Lori Barkley, a Sinixt Peoples representative. Lori educated the WCCs on the history of the Sinixt in the area and how to incorporate the Sinixt peoples’ message of respect for wildlife into our programs.

## Special Initiatives

### Fruit Gleaning & Pressing

The WCC coordinated the annual Rossland fruit gleaning and pressing (due to usual coordinators not being available) on September 16, 2023. The fruit gleaning was too late since most fruit had ripened already and been picked by bears or people. The BSTF and Food Security Task Force are discussing how to change the gleaning program to adapt better to fruit ripening at different times of the season. The BSTF is also collaborating with the Food Security Task Force to investigate options for fruit tree management and removal programs. 17 people participated in the fruit pressing.

### Fruit Finder App

In conjunction with the Food Security Task Force and the BSTF, the City of Rossland commissioned the creation of a Fruit Finder app. WildSafeBC staff and BSTF volunteers counted and mapped the location of fruit trees between the Fall of 2022 and Spring of 2023. The app (<https://rosslandsustainability.com/rossland-fruit-finder/>) is available to the public to find fruit trees to pick or to add fruit trees that are not already on the app, and label the trees as public, private or shared, as well as the status of the tree as to whether it is ready to be picked or has already been picked. The app shows approximately 1000 fruit trees in Rossland with about 125 of those trees on city property. This does not include trees such as Mountain Ash, Elderberry, and Saskatoon berry. In November, the software developer of the app started a redesign to make it more user-friendly and versatile. The WCC was involved in user testing, advertising the app to residents, and setting requirements for the redesign.

### BC Goes Wild

September was “BC Goes Wild” month. The WCC set up a bear trivia trail on the trails around the reservoir where people could stop to read 11 different pieces of information about bears while they hiked. They could also pick up (at the trailhead) a form to summarize what they learnt and then submit it to earn a pack of bear trivia playing cards. The WCC talked to about 10 people who saw and enjoyed the bear trivia, but only 2 people submitted their forms.

### Bear Smart Program

Rossland is currently pursuing Bear Smart Community status. To this end, the BSTF was created in 2021. The Bear Hazard Assessment (BHA) was completed in June, 2023, and presented to

the Rossland City Council on September 11, 2023. The city council accepted the BHA and then moved to “investigate options to complete a bear-human conflict management plan beginning in the fall of 2024”. Fruit tree and garbage management were identified as the main issues in the BHA, along with public attitudes towards bears. Work will start on the Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan in the fall of 2024 once the new curbside organics program has been running for a year and its impact on bear issues in Rossland can be evaluated.

The WCC has been an active participant in the BSTF this year. The Natural Control Alternatives (NCA) Society has also been working closely with the BSTF this year to look at options for more bear-proof communal garbage bins. The society manages four bear-proof communal public waste bins in the parking lot at the Rossland Arena from April to November. Residents of Rossland can dispose of their garbage by donation. These bins have been very successful this year. The WCC promoted the use of these bins as a good option for areas with late collection times, for those unable to be present on collection day or for those with excess garbage.

The BSTF hosted an educational event / fundraiser (“Bearfest”) for the Northern Lights Wildlife Society (NLWS) in September (Figure 4). The WCC, NLWS founder Angelika Langen, the BSTF chair and Andrew Bennett (Moon Gravity Farm) gave presentations.



Figure 4. Bear Smart Task Force Bearfest Event, 2023. Photo: T. Mercer

## Challenges and Opportunities

Key challenges throughout the season included low reporting of incidents to the COS, lack of fruit tree management, lack of access to affordable bear-resistant waste receptacles, and inconsistent and late garbage pick-up times.

### Reporting to the COS

The WCC noticed that many members of the public will report wildlife sightings verbally or on social media, rather than calling the COS. Through conversation with the public, the WCC found that residents of Rossland have the misconception that any report of a bear to the COS will result

in the bear being killed. This means that problem areas in Rossland are hard to determine. Future WCCs should focus education on dispelling this myth and increase knowledge about the steps the COS takes in preventing a bear from becoming habituated. The COS in Rossland work closely with the WCC to provide education and advice to residents experiencing human wildlife conflicts.

## Garbage

Late pick-up times for garbage (from 12 – 3pm) results in garbage bins being left on the curb for most of the day. Local bears have learnt the garbage schedule and frequent these neighbourhoods. Residents often wait to put their garbage out until close to the pickup time or even wait until they can hear the garbage truck. As mentioned previously, many residents choose to use the communal bins at the arena. Residents who put their garbage out early and then are away from home all day are more likely to have issues with escalating bad behaviour from bears to the point where the bears have broken into structures to access garbage on non-pickup days.

Another issue in Rossland is the improper securing of waste bins between collection days. Most residents wait until the morning of collection to put their garbage on the curb, but some are not keeping this attractant secure between garbage days. Where unsecured bins on private property were visible, door-to-door education was used to inform residents that unsecured garbage is a leading cause of human-wildlife conflicts in the community, leading to safety concerns and unnecessary harm to wildlife.

## Organics

The Regional District of Kootenay Boundary (RDKB) curbside organics program started the first week of October and in the first week the new “critter-resistant” organics bins were accessed by bears and the contents of a large number of bins were strewn all over the place. These bins are very easily accessed by bears and raccoons. Many residents opted to not participate in the program, and some returned their bins to the RDKB. A few residents upgraded to bear-resistant bins for \$200. These bear-resistant bins appear to work well with keeping bears from accessing the contents.

## Fruit trees

Fruit trees continue to be a major attractant in Rossland. Data from the Fruit Finder app show that there are approximately 1000 fruit trees in Rossland, with about 125 of those on City property. Some of these trees are inaccessible to harvest and many are not harvested or managed on both private and City property.

This unnatural food source draws many species of wildlife into residential areas. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in Rossland and these areas benefit from increased education, tree management and fruit gleaning activities. In 2023, from observations around town and conversations with residents, huckleberry season finished earlier than usual and fruit trees in the City ripened early – both around the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of August. Reports of bears in town in Facebook posts as well as from HWCR and bylaw reports started increasing in the third week of August:

- Reports to the COS of bears in garbage increased from none in July to two in the third week of August to 8 in September.
- Reports to bylaw of neighbours not picking fruit off the ground started with one report on August 1<sup>st</sup>, then one the last week of August and 2 the first week of September.

## Food-conditioned / Habituated Bears in Rossland

Within Rossland, over the last few years, there has been an increase in the occurrence of bears breaking into residents' cars, homes and buildings. Most of the break-ins are never reported to the COS and the WCC learns about these from conversations with the public. The WCC focused a lot of effort through door-knocking conversations this year to find the root causes that lead to this behaviour. The following outlines initial anecdotal impressions on bear behaviour based on conversations with the public, the COS data, and social media (note: this information is anecdotal and should be studied further by wildlife biologist):

1. Facebook posts show that people are generally welcoming of bears in town in the Spring when they are eating grass and clover. Many residents take photos and comment on Facebook about how cute they are. There were three HWCR reports in May and one in June of bears getting into garbage and one of a bear getting into a house in July. Huckleberries started ripening around the third week of June. This correlated with a decrease in the reports of sightings, which could mean the bears headed out of town when a natural food source became available to eat huckleberries.
2. When the huckleberries and other berries finished for the season, bears seemed to head back into the City of Rossland. This coincided with fruit ripening on many trees in town. Many sightings were reported on social media and by word-of-mouth of bears in fruit trees, but not causing any safety concerns.
3. Fruit started to wane in mid-September. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, the community fruit gleaning day, the number of fruit trees with fruit to harvest was so low, that no-one headed out to glean fruit. At this time, reports on social media indicated that bears remained within the City and did not head back into the surrounding mountains. Reports on social media and in HWCR reports also indicated bears were getting into garbage on garbage pickup days.
4. Bears enter the hyperphagia stage in early fall, when they need high amounts of calories (20,000 per day on average) to get ready for hibernation.
5. In October, bears have entered hyperphagea and are looking to gain thousands of calories per day. Bears have started damaging and accessing buildings and cars, which could have posed a public safety risk. At this point, residents reported incidents COS.

Education in this area has centred on explaining how the process of habituation occurs and leads to problematic wildlife behaviours, helping people to manage their attractants, and (from a safe distance) tell bears to leave their property, even when they are just eating grass and clover. Education has also addressed calling the COS early, using the communal bear-proof garbage bins at the arena, and managing fruit trees (pruning, harvesting and picking fruit off the ground).

## Suggested Initiatives for 2024

Further initiatives suggested for the 2024 season are:

- Host a workshop with the local COS to explain further the relationship between WildSafeBC, the Rossland Bylaw Officer, and the COS.
- Host electric fence demonstrations for residents and collaborate with Andrew Bennett (Moon Gravity Farm) to make the demonstrations and presentations fun and engaging.
- Continue education campaigns focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media and news articles, and more workshops.
- Increase door-to-door canvassing and continue to focus on human-wildlife conflict hotspots.
- Continue working with the Bear Smart Task Force and Food Security Task Force to come up with a program to help with fruit tree management and/or replacement of fruit-bearing trees (with non-fruit and non-nut bearing trees) on public property and private property.
- Continue working with the Bear Smart Task Force to come up with better suggestions for garbage management in Rossland.
- Monitor the new curbside organics program and its impact on bear issues in Rossland.

## Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC Rossland Coordinator is grateful for the generous support the program receives from its funders including the City of Rossland, the Columbia Basin Trust, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF) and the Province of British Columbia. The WCC also thanks the BCCF team, the local BC Conservation Office Service team, and the Bylaw Officer for communication and shared knowledge of wildlife activity and advice.