

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

Squamish-Lillooet Regional District

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Squamish-Lillooet Regional District (SLRD) Program between May 15th and November 30th, 2023. The SLRD consists of four member municipalities (District of Lillooet, Village of Pemberton, Resort Municipality of Whistler, District of Squamish) and four unincorporated rural Electoral Areas (A, B, C, D), including D'Arcy, Britannia Beach, Furry Creek. The SLRD is located within the unceded traditional territories of the Líl'wat, Squamish, St'at'imc, Stó:lō, Tseil-Waututh, Nlaka'pamux, Tsilhqot'in, and Secwepemc Nations.

In 2023, the WildSafeBC SLRD Program entered its 4th year and complemented the work being done in the Bear Smart Communities of the District of Squamish and the Resort Municipality of Whistler. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the Regional District. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the season:

- 3 WildSafe Ranger presentations and 101 youth reached.
- 12 display booths and over 400 people reached.
- 4 presentations given to community groups reaching 80 participants.
- 124 door hangers given in person or left during door-to-door outreach.
- 3 bin tagging outings and 29 bins tagged, nearly 75% decrease in early tote placement to the curb since program initiation.
- 27 Facebook posts and 7 new Facebook page followers from January 1, 2023 to November 30, 2023.
- Bare Campsite – 2 campsites visited to review best practices and provide resources

Overall, community members expressed that they enjoy the interactive bear spray workshops, as well as educational sessions on local wildlife safety. There was a diversity of audiences and locations targeted in outreach activities this season. Outreach was limited in the Gun Lake region this season due to extensive wildfires.

The WCC thanks the British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF), the Province of BC, and the SLRD for funding the program. Moving forward, the WCC hopes the WildSafeBC program will continue to build on future initiatives and collaborations to help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Squamish-Lillooet Regional District program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: WCC Elise Pullar educating community members about local wildlife in Furry Creek, BC.

Highlights from the 2023 Season

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of 3 WRP presentations were delivered with 101 students becoming WildSafe Rangers and receiving WRP kits to take home (Table 1; Figure 2). Of these, 16 students received a modified version for an older audience which included education on bear spray. Example:

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

School	Grade	Students
Sea to Sky Reading group	K-7	26
Sea to Sky Community Services Playgroup	Pre-K	35
Pemberton Secondary School	8, 9	40
Total		101



Figure 2. Children visiting WildSafeBC display booth and storyboard at WRP.

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave 4 presentations delivered through indoor and outdoor presentations to 80 participants (Table 2; Figure 3).

Table 2. WildSafeBC Presentations to community groups in 2023.

Organization or Location	Type of Presentation	Date	Attendees (#)
Whistler Public Library – New Canadians	Bear Safety & Bear Spray	June 24	17
Sea to Sky Community group	Living in bear country	August 9	12
Lafarge workplace safety presentation	Bear Safety & Bear Spray	July 16	36
Pemberton Meadows - local farmers	Bear spray	October 4	15
Total	4		80



Figure 3. WildSafeBC Community Coordinator explaining effective bear spray use in Pemberton Meadows.

Display Booths

The WCC hosted a total of 12 outdoor display booths (Figure 4) which were visited by over 500 people (Table 3). Locations were chosen based on community requests, human-wildlife conflict hotspots as identified by the COS, and areas prioritized to increase wildlife awareness in the community.



Figure 4. WildSafeBC Display Booths setup for community outreach events.

Table 3. WildSafeBC display booths throughout the 2023 season.

Location	Reach (#)	Date(s)	Summary
Lillooet Farmers' Market	29	July 7	Provided information on camping/hiking safety, electric fencing, wildlife, bare camping, provided brochures, tattoos and handouts.
Pemberton Farmers' Market	38	June 30, July 14	Provided information regarding local fruit gleaning organizations, securing attractants, electric fencing, livestock husbandry, wildlife information, provided brochures and handouts.
Wedgemount Lake Trailhead	65	July 10, August 28	Provided information regarding hiking safety, bear spray use, bare camping, wildlife activity and information, provided brochures and handouts.
Britannia Beach Community Park	6	June 15	Provided information regarding, securing attractants, electric fencing, livestock husbandry, wildlife information, provided brochures and handouts.
Furry Creek, Oliver's Landing Parking Lot	5	June 15	Collaboration with SLRD Waste Recovery and Communications staff. Provided information regarding, securing attractants, electric fencing, livestock husbandry, wildlife information, provided brochures and handouts.
Watersprite Lake Trailhead	41	August 1	Provided information regarding, securing attractants, electric fencing, livestock husbandry, wildlife information, provided brochures and handouts.
Semaphore Lake Trailhead	15	August 13	Provided information regarding hiking safety, bear spray use, bare camping, wildlife activity and information, provided brochures and handouts.
Seed Peak Trailhead	18	August 4	Provided information regarding hiking safety, bear spray use, bare camping, wildlife activity and information, provided brochures and handouts.
Black Tusk/ Pinecrest	12	July 16	Provided information regarding hiking safety, bear spray use, bare camping, wildlife activity and information, provided brochures and handouts.
Callaghan Lake	23	July 9	Provided information regarding hiking safety, bear spray use, bare camping, wildlife activity and information, provided brochures and handouts.
Total	197		

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Through door-to-door education, 124 households were reached with door hangers and a letter reminding residents of the SLRD's wildlife attractant bylaw. The WCC also conducted by-in-person conversations with residents. Pemberton, Furry Creek, Britannia Beach neighborhoods were prioritized for this activity to increase wildlife awareness and coexistence strategies within

the community. Collins Rd and Reid Rd were visited after reports of high bear activity in the area. Collins Rd had vehicle break-ins and Reid Rd was concerned about an increase in grizzly activity.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. During three outings, a total of 29 bins were tagged in Britannia Beach and Furry Creek and 7 had received stickers previously. Britannia Beach has the highest number of residents in non-compliance of the SLRD wildlife attractant bylaw which prohibits the early placement of waste bins for collection. The effectiveness of garbage tagging, social media, and door-to-door education for changing behaviors is demonstrated by a 75% decrease in non-compliance in Britannia Beach since the inception of the WildSafeBC SLRD program in 2020 (Figure 5). Bins that were curbside outside of the permitted hours commonly belonged to repeat offenders.

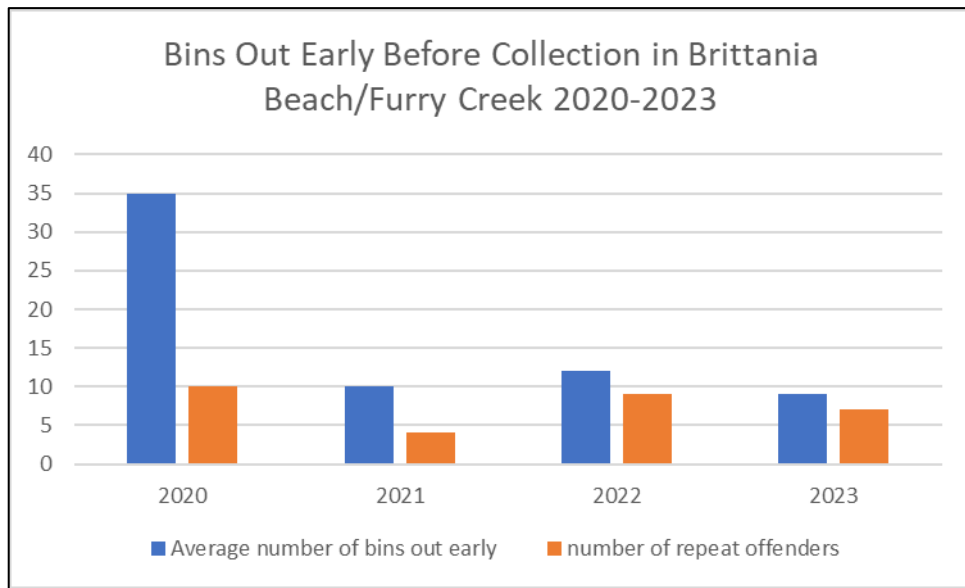


Figure 5. Number of bins placed out early for collection and repeat offenders, 2020-2023 in Britannia Beach/Furry Creek BC.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Squamish Lillooet RD page grew in 2023 from 1014-1021 followers. Social media posts were regularly shared two to three times per week throughout the season. These posts provided wildlife information and were often relevant to community concerns. Posts were created and shared to align with wildlife seasonal lifecycles. The SRLD published one [press release](#) announcing the return of the WildSafeBC program to the SLRD in 2023 and introducing the new WCC.

Electric Fencing

The electric fencing cost-share program was launched last season and made available to SLRD residents. The program served to offset the cost of electric fencing materials for residents who have attractants that cannot otherwise be managed. Using electric fencing to control livestock

and secure attractants has been common practice for decades in the District (Figure 6); however, inadequacies in design and/or material choice repeatedly result in fence failure. This program addresses that issue by requiring participants to meet certain standards in design and material choice. Moreover, the education and guidance provided through the program provides homeowners with a deeper level of comprehension and trust in electric fencing. The cost-share sparked interest in many SLRD communities, with most interest originating from the agricultural-heavy Pemberton community. Several residents in Area B and C contacted the WCC this year after learning about the cost-share for general information on electric fencing. After proper training, the WCC will be able to implement this program in future seasons.



Figure 6. Electric wires outrigged around a chicken coop using materials funded through the WildSafeBC cost-share program.

Collaborations

The WCC communicated with the COS throughout the season and provided outreach in areas experiencing wildlife conflict. Coast to Cascades Grizzly Initiative supported the WCC by organizing community groups for WSBC hosted bear spray workshops. Presentation and display booths were facilitated through the help of the Pemberton and Lillooet Farmers' Market, and the SLRD team.

WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses 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 participated in 2024.

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. Two campsites were evaluated for bare safe practices in 2023.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

After wildfires Area A and B, black bear activity increased on the unceded territory of the *St'át'imc Nation*, causing concern from the local first nation about their chickens and the safety of their elders. As requested, the WCC provided resources to the Chief and Council on this matter through Darryl, who reached out from the Tribal Council.

The WCC could only provide limited support in Indigenous communities due to jurisdictional boundaries linked to SLRD funding. With SLRD funding allocated specifically to assist Indigenous communities neighboring the SLRD areas, the future WCC could better support human-wildlife conflict reduction through collaboration, education and relationship building efforts.

Challenges and Opportunities

Garbage continues to be the main source of attractants in the SLRD that draw wildlife into residential areas. Bears have been reported damaging waste and compost bins and travelling into people's yards which impacts the safety of the community. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the SLRD and would benefit from increased education and bear-resistant products.

To address the attractiveness of residential solid waste and local fruit trees in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2024:

- Continues development on a well-established electric fence cost-sharing program with an education component to address wildlife conflicts linked to compost/livestock/crop.
- Increased garbage tagging and door-to-door in fruit tree and garbage hot spot areas.
- Education campaigns focused on the hazards and solutions posed through unsecured garbage and organics through social media, news articles, and workshops.
- Connect residents through social media community groups.
- Work with the SLRD to encourage more residential use of bear-resistant bins.
- Engage food banks and other non-profits with fruit tree picking.

Fruit trees also persist as a source of attractants in the SLRD. Bears and deer have been reported damaging fences and remaining in people's yards, which impacts the safety of the community. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community and would benefit from increased education, electric fencing, and fruit gleaning activities.

Electric fencing to deter predatory wildlife from accessing attractants that cannot otherwise be managed should continue to be encouraged by the WCC throughout the SLRD. This should be built upon through continued promotion within communities and on social media. The results of a cost-share are influential and can spark repeated interest from friends and family of those who

have participated in the program. The WCC should increase the amount of electric fencing workshops and demonstrations next season, as it increases community trust and understanding. Aiming to make these events available in each electoral area will ensure consistent delivery throughout the Regional District.

Continued encouragement of conflict reporting to the RAPP line is suggested for upcoming years. While many residents share wildlife sightings and conflict information on social media groups, they regularly go unreported to the COS. Additionally, some communities in the SLRD exhibit a reluctance to report while publicly sharing misconceptions surrounding the COS. Certain areas of the SLRD may underreport due to a combination of their isolated nature, a sense that it is customary for wildlife to access residential attractants, or residents not knowing when or how to report human-wildlife conflicts. Continued collaboration with the COS to address these issues is an opportunity for the Program in the future.

Continued expansion of the WildSafeBC SLRD program to Indigenous and rural communities should continue to occur for all SLRD residents to have access to the Program. Much of the SLRD is comprised of small, isolated communities, with few organizations or businesses operating nearby. Continuing to develop relationships with residents, local community groups, First Nations, and businesses is essential for program delivery in these regions.

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