

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

Sunshine Coast

Prepared by: Julie McNeil, WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast
Community Coordinator



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast Program between May 15th and November 30th, 2023. The program area covers the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) which spans from Port Mellon to Egmont (**Error! Reference source not found.**), including the traditional territories of the Shíshálh (Sechelt) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations. The SCRD is comprised of eight administrative regions which include:

- Area A: Pender Harbour and Egmont
- Area B: Halfmoon Bay
- Area D: Roberts Creek
- Area E: Elphinstone
- Area F: West Howe Sound
- District of Sechelt (DOS)
- Sechelt Indian Government District (SIGD or shíshálh Nation)
- Town of Gibsons (TOG)

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the 2023 season:

- 15 WildSafe Ranger presentations reaching 359 youth.
- 4 community presentations delivered to 115 participants.
- 12 display booths and 715 people were reached.
- 393 people reached through Door-to-door in person and 601 door hangers left.
- 25 Bin tagging outings and 314 bins tagged.
- Over 35 Facebook posts were published gaining 98 new Facebook page followers from January 1, 2023, to November 30, 2023.
- 1 Business signed onto the Business Pledge Program.
- 3 Campgrounds received multiple visits regarding the Bare Campsite Program and over 280 campers were reached.

The success of the Sunshine Coast WildSafeBC program would not have been possible without the support of the SCRD, the B.C. Conservation Officer Service (COS), and amazing volunteers. There are many opportunities to further engage the community through the Business Pledge program, Bare Camping program, community events, and WRP in 2024. Education and outreach through social and traditional media will be useful tools for educating residents. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

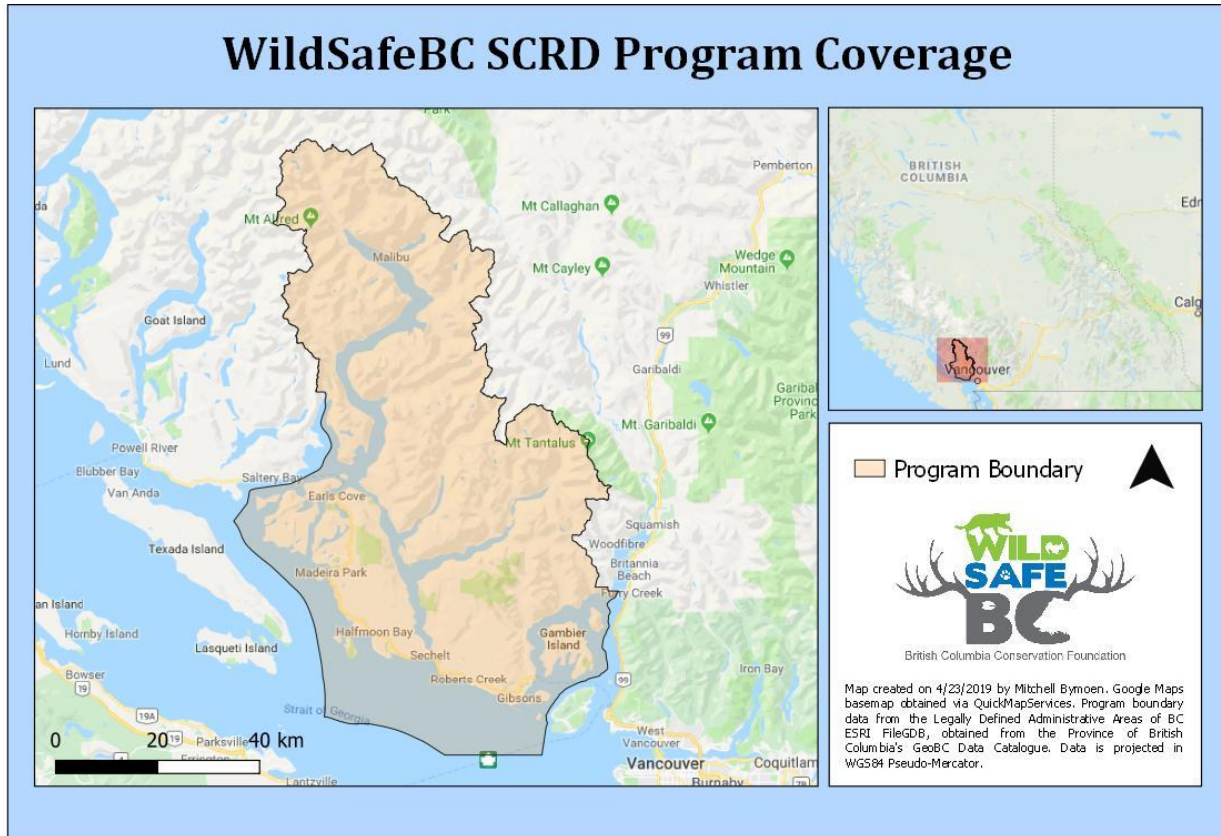


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program coverage area.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2023 Season	4
WildSafe Ranger Program	4
Presentations to Community Groups	4
Display Booths	4
Door-to-Door Education & Bin Tagging.....	5
Social Media and Press	6
Wildlife in Area Signs.....	7
Business Pledge Program	7
Bare Campsite Program	7
Indigenous Awareness and Engagement	8
Special Initiatives.....	8
Collaborations	8
Challenges and Opportunities	9
Acknowledgements.....	10

Table of Figures

Figure 1. WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program coverage area	2
Table 1. Schools & youth organizations that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2023....	4
Table 2. WildSafeBC presentations to Community Groups in 2023.....	4
Table 3. WildSafeBC Display booths set up in 2023.....	5
Figure 2. Display booth at Gibsons Farmers Market. August 20, 2023.....	5
Figure 3. Number of waste bins tagged before (blue; n=148) and after (red; n=55) education activities in the Sunshine Coast, B.C. 2023.....	6
Figure 4. Bear in area sign placed at a trailhead in Gibsons.....	7
Figure 5. Garbage accessed by black bear in Sechelt.....	9

Cover Photo: Sow and cubs eating garbage. Credit: Sargent Miller, B.C. Conservation Officer Service (COS).

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 4 schools and 1 youth organization participated in the WRP through in-person sessions and outdoor presentations (Table 1). In total, 359 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits to take home. Of these, 63 students received the extended version which included two visits, an outdoor activity, and a take home assignment on attractant management that was reviewed in class.

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

School/Organization	Grade	Students	Extended
Gibsons Elementary	K, 1, 2, 3, 4	159	Y
Davis Bay Elementary- NEST Program	K, 1, 2, 3	43	N
Halfmoon Bay Elementary	2, 3	20	N
Langdale Elementary	K, 1, 2, 3	60	N
Girl Guides	K-7	77	N
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS		359	

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave a total of 4 community presentations to 115 participants (Table 2). A bear spray workshop was organized and delivered to the public. Many attendees stated that while they carry bear spray, they never learned how to properly use it. Post-workshop surveys indicate that attendees gained more confidence and felt more comfortable regarding bear spray use. The WCC also delivered Wildlife Awareness and Safety presentations to two secondary schools and a general WildSafeBC presentation to the Pender Harbour Wildlife Society.

Table 2. WildSafeBC presentations to Community Groups in 2023.

Group	Type of Presentation	Number of Attendees
Sunshine Coast Residents	Bear Spray Workshop	18
Pender Harbour Secondary	Wildlife Awareness and Safety	61
Chatelech Secondary	Wildlife Awareness and Safety	25
Pender Harbour Wildlife Society	WildSafeBC Program	15
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS		115

Display Booths

Display booths at community events, such as the farmers market, the Artisan Seaside Market, and Apple Festivals, were a great way to connect with residents and tourists alike. Display booths were set up at a total of 12 times at various locations and events throughout the community,

reaching a total of 715 people (Table 3). The WCC shared information about interesting wildlife facts, bear spray, wildlife encounters, and attractant management. The visual aspects of the display booth (Figure 2), such as the skulls and bear hide, were especially favourable and provided the opportunity to engage in a more in-depth discussion regarding local wildlife. Display booths proved to be an asset in receiving valuable information from residents pertaining to recent wildlife sightings and local human-wildlife conflict.

Table 3. WildSafeBC Display booths set up in 2023.

Date	Event/Location	People Reached (#)
August 5	Sechelt Visitor Centre	18
August 6	Gibsons Farmers Market	90
August 12	Gibsons Visitor Centre	9
August 20	Gibsons Farmers Market	71
August 26	Artisan Seaside Market	106
August 27	Cliff Gilker Regional Park Trailhead	31
September 3	Gibsons Farmers Market	42
September 24	Banditry Cider Apple Fest	122
October 21	Sechelt Visitor Centre	30
October 22	Trail Bay Mall	51
November 4	Sunshine Coast Apple Festival	145
Total Reach		715



Figure 2. Display booth at Gibsons Farmers Market. August 20, 2023.

Door-to-Door Education & Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education was conducted in response to frequent wildlife sightings and reported human-wildlife conflict. The WCC left just over 600 door hangers, and personally spoke to 393 residents. Door-to-door outreach provided the opportunity to share wildlife safety and attractant

management tips with neighbourhoods experiencing higher levels of wildlife activity. The WCC received information regarding residential wildlife sightings and conflicts by the COS, Sunshine Coast Bear Alliance, and residents via email, Facebook, or in person at display booths. Most areas were targeted due to reports of black bears accessing waste containers, fruit trees, or livestock. However, there were also reports of bears accessing homes and garages.

Bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of solid waste containers set curbside the day before collection. Throughout the season, 25 bin tagging outings were conducted. Through this, a total of 314 bins were tagged in Gibsons, Roberts Creek, Sechelt, and Halfmoon Bay (Figure 3). The initial surveys conducted in August demonstrate that 148 bins were left out early. In comparison, the findings of the final survey conducted in late October/November indicate that only 55 bins were left out early. Out of the 55 bins reported in the final survey, 22 were from repeat offenders. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviour is demonstrated by the 85% decrease in bins being left out early.

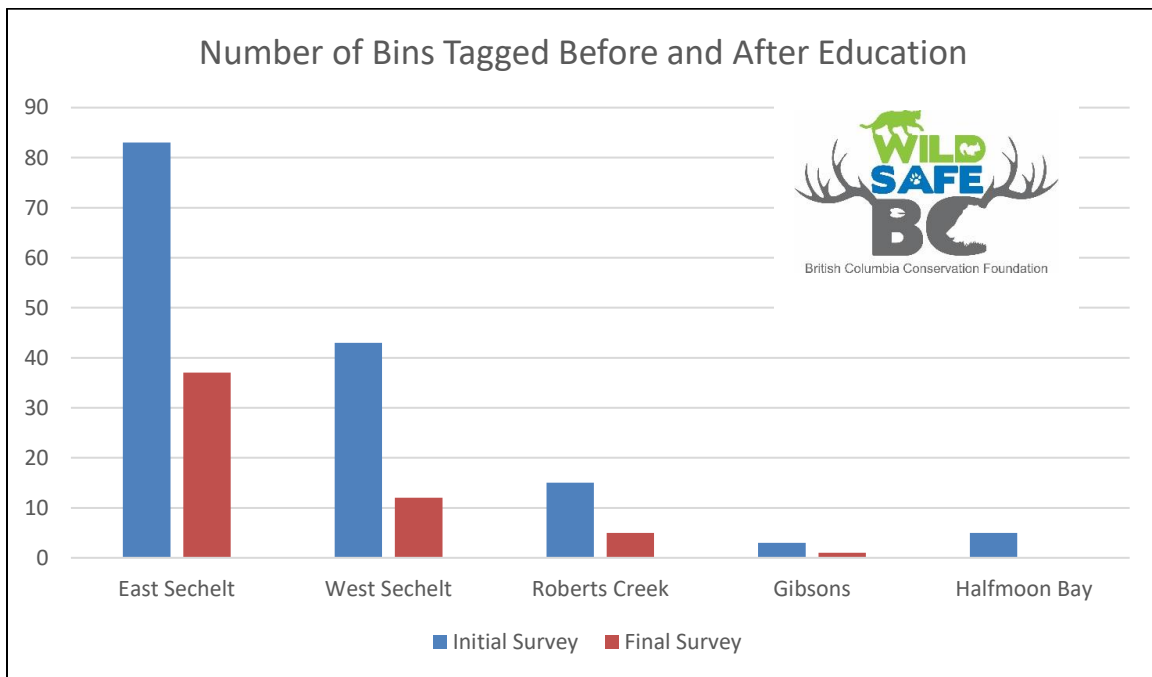


Figure 3. Number of waste bins tagged before (blue; n=148) and after (red; n=55) education activities in the Sunshine Coast, B.C. 2023.

Social Media and Press

The WCC used social media and press to share WildSafeBC messaging. The WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program increased its presence on Facebook with over 40 posts in 2023. The number of followers on the Facebook page grew by 6% from 1,598 to 1,696. Interaction with the local media resulted in the following articles being published:

- *Coast Reporter* published fall bear awareness and safety information, [How To Be Bear Aware This Fall](#).

- *CBC On The Coast Radio* released a segment discussing bear activity in the Sunshine Coast and attractant management, titled [Sunshine Coast Bear Stories](#). This radio interview received positive feedback from the community.

Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife in Area signs were placed at various wildlife activity hotspots across the Sunshine Coast based on reports from the COS, bylaw officers, SCRCD sponsors, and the public (Figure 4). On average, signs were left for 2-4 weeks, depending on the situation and location. For example, residential areas with high reports of bear or cougar activity received residential warning signs for a longer duration. Several SCRCD parks experienced dog-wildlife conflict, specifically with bears and off-leash dogs. Signs were placed in these parks for the duration of the summer months. Overall, a total of 12 signs were placed around the Sunshine Coast in 2023.



Figure 4. Bear in area sign placed at a trailhead in Gibsons.

Business Pledge Program

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to be 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. A total of twelve businesses were approached about the program and one business, Trail Bay Source for Sports, signed the pledge this year.

Bare Campsite Program

Through the 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. This year, a total of 4 campgrounds were approached; Porpoise Bay Provincial Park Campground, Roberts Creek Provincial Park Campground, and Homesite Creek Campground.

The WCC provided campgrounds with Bare Campsite brochures, posters, and educational materials for campers. The WCC also visited these campgrounds throughout the season and educated over 280 campers on bare camping procedures, wildlife sightings, and safety while camping. Brochures were also delivered to Bayside Campground and RV Park to provide to campers. These campgrounds should be follow-up with in future seasons to take the next steps of the program.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

At the beginning of the season, the WCC completed training relating to Indigenous Awareness through the Indigenous Relations Academy. The WCC found the contents of this course to be valuable in performing outreach activities throughout the season. In 2024, it would be ideal to form a working relationship with the Shíshálh (Sechelt) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations.

Special Initiatives

The WCC participated in multiple special initiatives throughout the season. BC Goes Wild is a campaign to celebrate wildlife in BC. The Campaign is held annually in September, which is typically the month when human-bear conflicts are at their highest. Throughout the month, the WCC collaborated with several libraries to feature BC Goes Wild tables that included wildlife-related books and WildSafeBC educational materials. The WCC also hosted an event celebrating the local salmon run in collaboration with the Chapman Creek Hatchery. The event featured games and a storybook trail walk to teach youth about the lifecycle of this keystone species. A total of 50 people participated in the event.

In October, the WCC held a contest to bring awareness to bear activity in the fall. The winner of the contest received a jar full of gummy bears that represented a third of calories that a bear eats during hyperphagia. The winner also received a WildSafeBC swag and educational materials. This contest was designed to not only educate residents about bear activity and attractant management, but to also promote community involvement in the WildSafeBC program, as the WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast Program was inactive the previous year.

Lastly, with the support of the COS and the Sunshine Coast Bear Alliance, the WCC lobbied for wildlife warning traffic signs to be placed along stretches of highway that saw increased levels of wildlife collision.

Collaborations

Collaborating with the COS is an essential part of this role. Communication between the COS and the WCC resulted in the ability to provide consistent messaging and education to community members. Through collaboration, the WCC and the COS were able to support various neighbourhoods experiencing human-wildlife conflict.

Community Collaborations are also essential to the success of WildSafeBC. Collaborating with the Sunshine Coast Bear Alliance and Bear Awareness & Safety served an important role in increasing wildlife education and awareness within communities. This collaboration provided the

opportunity to provide consistent and effective messaging to the public, as well as share information about wildlife activity in the community. The Sunshine Coast will continue to benefit from collaborations with local groups, as these groups will serve the community year-round. Continued public education regarding human-wildlife conflict is essential during the hibernation months of WildSafeBC.

Working with BC Parks provided the WCC the opportunity to share information about the Bare Campsite Program to provincial park campers. Collaboration between the WCC and the BC Park Operator allowed for a discussion of implementing a campsite reviewing document. This will provide a larger scope of reach in educating campers on “bare camping” etiquette.

The WCC also connected with One Straw Society regarding their fruit gleaning program. This program reduces local fruit waste by providing tools to residents to make fruit picking more accessible. The WCC shared tools and information regarding One Straw Society’s fruit gleaning program with residents during door-to-door canvassing and promoted the program on the WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast Facebook page.

Challenges and Opportunities

Unsecured garbage and waste management remains a challenge in the community (Figure 5). Education in the area should continue to focus on finding solutions for residents to safely store waste containers on and in between collection days. As per regulations imposed by the SCRCD, this is the first year that the entire region is required to separate organic waste from garbage. With the new regulations and a revised collection schedule, increased efforts for bin tagging and door-to-door education regarding waste management should be prioritized for 2024. Similarly, the region would benefit from stricter wording on waste management bylaws. This is supported by bin tagging data this season. The Township of Gibsons had very few residents place their bins out the night before collection, whereas the District of Sechelt produced 74 times more bins being tagged despite the population only being twice the size (Figure 3). This illustrates the efficacy of the waste management bylaws in the Township of Gibsons. As such, it is recommended that waste management bylaws within the SCRCD and the District of Sechelt emulate those of the Township of Gibsons. Further, it is recommended that consistent messaging in bylaws is used throughout the region.



Figure 5. Garbage accessed by black bear in Sechelt.

Fruit trees also continue to be a source of attractants in the community that draw wildlife into residential areas. In recent years, bears have been reported damaging fences and remaining in people's yards which impacts the safety of the neighbourhood. The topic of fruit trees, however, has proven to be a point of contention within the community. To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2024:

- Electric fence demonstrations to teach residents to protect their trees.
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information.
- Engage food banks and other non-profits, such as One Straw Society, and the Sunshine Coast Food Bank.
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots.

Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program would not be possible without the financial and personnel support of the SCRDC, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the Province of British Columbia. The WCC would like to thank Andrea Patrao, Rachel Newland, and Marc Sole with the SCRDC for their guidance. Sargent Miller, Conservation Officer Klassen, and Conservation Officer Lafferty with the BC Conservation Officer Service for their support and collaboration. The WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program would also like to acknowledge Sue Booth Town of Gibsons bylaw, as well as Elyse Guzek and Rod Dalziel with BC Parks for their continuing support of the program's outreach. Finally, a big thank you to our dedicated volunteers this year, Alexander Marks and Denise Burns.