

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

qathet Regional District

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qathet
REGIONAL DISTRICT



POWELL RIVER
COMMUNITY
FOREST



Executive Summary

This report is an overview of the WildSafeBC qathet Regional District (qRD) Program between May 1st and November 30th, 2023. This has been the eighth year that WildSafeBC has delivered programming to communities in the qRD, including, but not limited to, the city of Powell River (Figure 1). The qathet Regional District is located on the traditional territories of the Tla'amin, shíshálh, Klahoose, Nanoose, Homalco, and K'ómoks First Nations. qathet (qat^hət), the name gifted to the former Powell River Regional District by Tla'amin Elders in 2017, means 'working together, bringing together' in the mainland Comox dialect (?ayajuθəm). There are an approximate 20,070 residents within this region (2016 consensus).

Through engagement with the community of Powell River, the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) was informed that fruit or nut-bearing trees, berries, livestock, and garbage were major wildlife attractants again this year. Further, the WCC notes that many residential human-wildlife conflicts go unreported to the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service (COS) in the area.

Programming in 2023 resembled that of past years, with an emphasis on maximum community engagement through social media, door-to-door education, display booths in high traffic areas, and WildSafe Ranger presentations at local elementary schools. The WildSafeBC programming was met with overwhelming support & encouragement from the public and continues to educate and deliver tangible solutions to human-wildlife conflict. Key program deliverables for 2023 include:

- 16 WildSafe Ranger presentations at 5 local elementary schools reaching 333 students.
- 6 Display Booths at the Powell River Farmers Market reaching 392 community members.
- 6 Door-to-door educational campaigns in conflict-affected areas reaching 105 homes.
- 31 Original social media posts, 11 additional reposts from the WildSafeBC provincial page, and 31 new page followers since May 01, 2023.

Key challenges to the 2023 program were primarily the result of scheduling conflicts with the WCC being absent from the community of Powell River for long periods of time. Looking ahead to 2024, the WCC hopes to see implementation of garbage tagging in Powell River. In addition, the WCC would like to see increased focus on the Bare Campsite Program for local campground personnel to have access to wildlife safety training, as well as feel empowered to educate campers on wildlife safety & enforce attractant management in their respective campgrounds.

WildSafeBC would like to thank the program sponsors at the qRD, the City of Powell River, the Powell River Community Forest Alliance, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the Province of British Columbia. The program would also like to offer special thanks to the generous support from the COS and conservation officer Leyland Klassen.

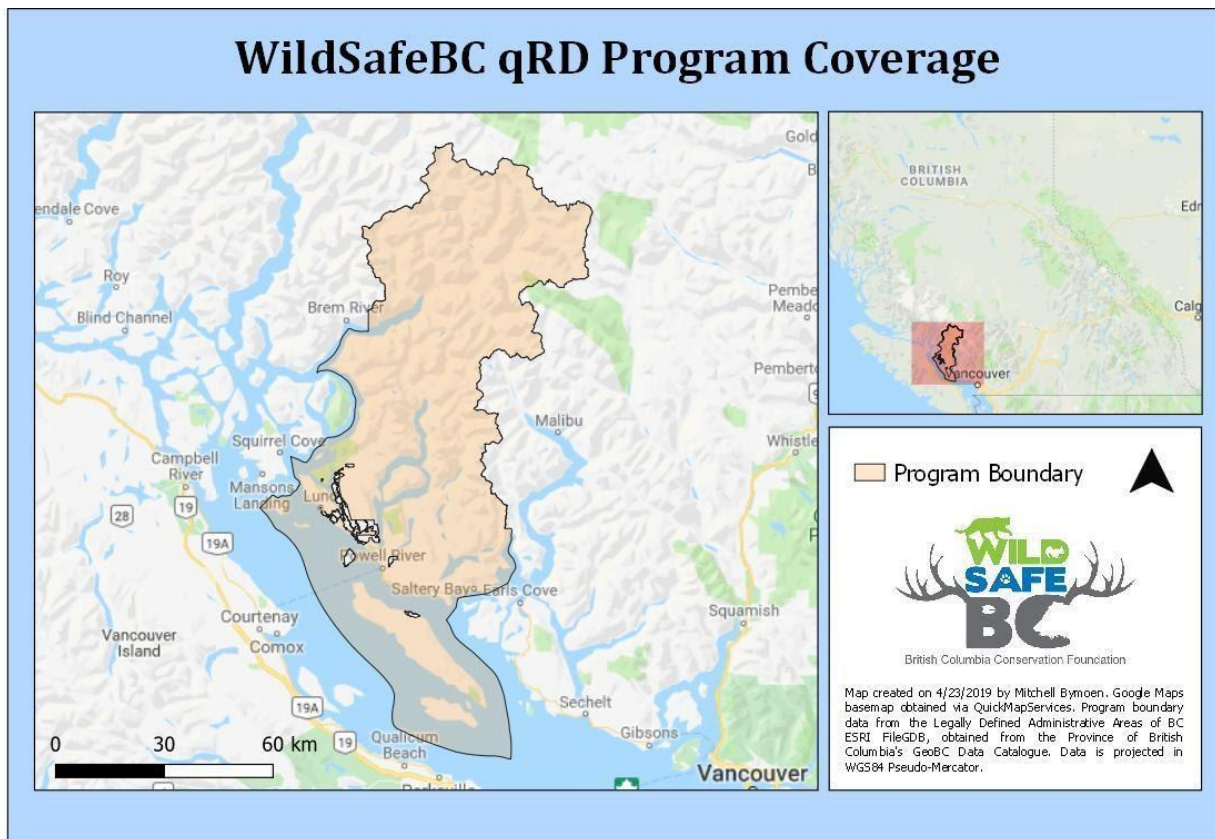


Figure 1. WildSafeBC qathet Regional District (qRD) Program coverage area.

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Highlights from the 2023 Season

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict and best practices to mitigate such conflict. A total of 16 presentations were delivered in classroom settings at 5 local elementary schools with 333 students becoming WildSafe Rangers (Table 1). Each student received a WRP kits with educational activities to take home. The WCC collaborated with Karin Westland, Outdoor Learning Coordinator of SD47, to promote WRP, which was met with overwhelming interest from teachers across the school district.

Table 1. Schools that took part in the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2023.

School	Grade	Students (#)
James Thomson Elementary	K - 6	104
Edgehill Elementary	K - 2, 4, 5	79
Westview Elementary	3 - 6	72
Powell River Christian School	JK - 4	58
Kelly Creek Community School	1 - 2	20
Total:		333

Wildlife Safety and Awareness Presentations

WildSafeBC Can offer community presentations about a number of topics, including wildlife safety and awareness, bear spray use, and electric fencing. The WCC offered to hold a bear-spray use workshop for community members at the Powell River Farmers Market outside of market hours. No discernible interest was shown for this event and it did not occur. The WCC's recommendation for 2024 is to create an RSVP event on social media and promoting the event more effectively.

The WCC would also like to see wildlife safety and awareness presentations given to some of the local tourism companies that operate around wildlife. From personal experience, the WCC recognizes that such presentations can be beneficial for local guides and can be tailored to the region. This should be prioritized in 2024.

Display Booths

Over the course of the 2023 season, the WCC held 6 display booths around Powell River (Figure 22), including Duck Lake with the Powell River Community Forest, and the Powell River Farmers Market, reaching 392 members of the public (Table 2).

The Powell River Farmers Market was chosen as a primary venue for WildSafeBC Display Booths as it provided the most-possible exposure to the public and was a great way to integrate the program firmly into the community by becoming a familiar presence at a weekly event.



Figure 2. WildSafeBC booths held at the Powell River Community Forest at Duck Lake & Powell River Farmers Market.

Table 2. Location of WildSafeBC display booths in Powell River in 2023.

Organizer	Date	People Reached
Powell River Community Forest	17/06/23	20
Powell River Farmers Market	15/07/23	53
Powell River Farmers Market	24/07/23	84
Powell River Farmers Market	09/09/23	77
Powell River Farmers Market	10/09/23	94
Powell River Farmers Market	17/09/23	64
Total:	6 Booths	392

Door-to-Door Education & Bin Tagging

Door to door (DTD) campaigns offer education on attractant management and preventative strategies to avoid wildlife conflict in Powell River. DTD education was delivered in areas affected by human-wildlife conflict with bears or cougars. Information about areas to prioritize was received from the local COS or through attention on social media. A total of 105 homes were reached through both in-person conversations as well as printed leave-behinds (Figure 3). Most of those reached through door-to-door education were already well educated on human-wildlife conflicts/attractant management and were making the best decisions based on their personal situations, with only a handful who were not managing their attractants responsibly. Several were considering the implementation of electric fencing around fruit trees and berry bushes to further reduce conflict.



Figure 3. Areas receiving WildSafeBC door-to-door education in the qathet Regional District in 2023.

Bin Tagging was not conducted in 2023 in the qRD. Conversations with the City of Powell River mid-June determined that bin tagging would not be an emphasis of the 2023 WildSafeBC program due to black bear conflicts pertaining to garbage being lower than previous years. The WCC received public reports that black bear conflict as a result of garbage management was consistently high throughout the summer through conversing with the public at Farmers Markets, WildSafe Ranger presentations, and door-to-door campaigns. The WCC believes that bin tagging should be a focus of the 2024 program in the qRD.

Social Media and Press

The audience of the WildSafeBC qRD page increased by 3% to 1,144 followers. A total of 31 original posts were made during the season, with 11 posts shared from the WildSafeBC Provincial page on a semi-regular weekly basis. Social media posts were tailored to provide educational information regarding black bears, attractant management, and local services and educational opportunities available in the district. High public interest in bear biology, attractant management, and the WildSafe Ranger program was noted for 2023, influencing the direction of the program for the remainder of the season. Public interaction on WildSafe qRD posts was highest in July and has substantially increased the pages reach from previous years (Figure 4).

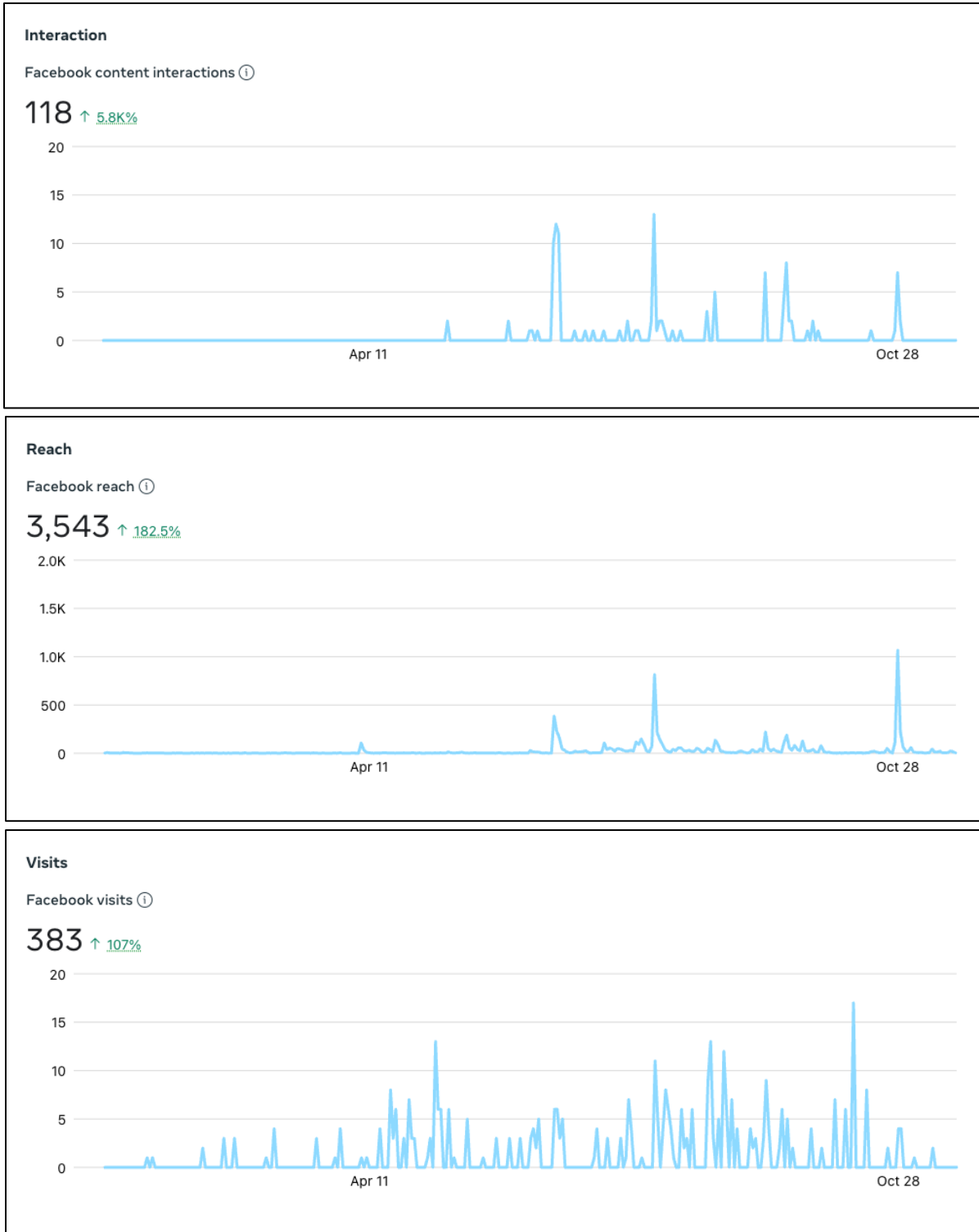


Figure 4. Statistical trends of reach & visitation to the WSBC qathet Regional District Facebook page from January to November, 2023.

Although social media content promoting the WildSafe Business Pledge, as well as educational opportunities like bear spray workshops was created, the WCC received no interest in either program. Creative solutions to increase interest and awareness in both programs through media should be a focus of 2024 in the qRD.

Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife in Area signs were not implemented in 2023 due to the sporadic schedule of the WCC in the community, as well as an overall abundance of black bears all over town, which made targeting specific areas somewhat challenging. The WCC recommends that the following trail systems could benefit from semi-permanent signage from either the 2024 WCC or local COS: Wildwood Bluffs and Upper Millennium Park.

Collaborations

In 2023, relations between the WildSafeBC program and the Powell River Farmers Market were strengthened with a regular presence at the Saturday and Sunday Markets. There has also been further collaboration with Skookum Gleaners and the promotion of their services on the WildSafeBC qRD social media page, and through door-to-door education for those who face difficulties in picking their fruit and nuts. This service has proved effective and popular among the public and the WCC would like to see further collaboration with Skookum Gleaners in 2024.

The position of the WCC and the WildSafeBC program could not exist without the support of the COS, and the collaboration of the two parties is vital to this program's success in their respective communities.

WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program

The WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program, while promoted on social media, did not receive any interest in the qRD for 2023. This should be a focus for 2024, particularly with some of the local grocery chains and gas stations that experienced conflict with black bears over the summer months in 2023.

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. The Bare Campsite Program received little attention in 2023 due to the WCC's schedule in the community during the peak summer months. A stronger effort should be made to reach campsites early next summer to ensure campground personnel are equipped with pamphlets, training, and support. The WCC would like to see campground personnel provide more education to recreational users about attractant management and ensure they have the necessary tools to enforce attractant management in their campsites.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC completed an Indigenous Awareness course offered through the Indigenous Relations Academy. Efforts to collaborate with Tla'amin were minimal this year, as were efforts to collaborate with other hamlets and communities besides Powell River within the qRD. The focus of this year's program was invested in the City of Powell River, but greater inclusion and attention given to the surrounding communities should be implemented in 2024.

Special Initiatives

The WCC participated in two special initiatives in the qRD in 2023, BC Goes Wild and the WildSafe Ranger colouring Contest. BC Goes Wild is a campaign to celebrate wildlife in BC and it occurs in September which is typically the month when human-bear conflicts are at their highest in BC. The 8th annual BC Goes Wild photo contest was promoted at the Powell River Farmers Market and on social media. The WildSafe Rangers Colouring Contest was also introduced in all the WSR presentations this season and met with lots of interest.

Challenges and Opportunities

The biggest challenge of the WildSafeBC qRD program in 2023 was the scheduling conflicts of the WCC, who was also working as a full-time expedition guide. Despite best efforts of the WCC, the wide-ranging program deliverables proved difficult to stay on top of while also being away from the community for a significant portion of the summer. Due to this absence, the WCC decided early on to focus on aspects of the program that would reach the most members of the public. As such, door-to-door education, WildSafe Ranger presentations, and display booths were prioritized. The WCC would have liked to have been present at major events or holidays in the community, such as Canada Day & Powell River Blackberry Festival where messaging could have been widely received.

The WildSafe Rangers program was of high demand and met with great success this year and to this the program owes thanks to Karin Westland, outdoor learning coordinator of SD47, who helped extend this program to schools in the district.

Attractant management, including garbage, livestock and fruit trees, continues to be a challenge in the qRD with the public noting that most conflicts go unreported to the COS. To address the issues with attractant management, following initiatives should be implemented in 2024:

- Encourage joint messaging between WildSafeBC and the COS to promote consistent reporting of wildlife conflicts.
- Setup display booths at major community events (i.e., Canada Day & Powell River Blackberry Festival) to share WildSafeBC messaging to a large public audience.
- Bin tagging performed with support from the City of Powell River,

- Offer more community workshops (bear spray & electric fencing) and find ways to advertise the workshops broadly through media to garner interest.
- Encourage additional campsites take part in the Bare Campsite program early in the season to equip operators with the proper tools and training before tourist season.
- Encourage local businesses to take the WildSafeBC Business Pledge, including local grocery chains and gas stations that experienced conflict with black bears over the summer months in 2023.
- Foster a greater presence in the communities of Tla'amin, Lund, Lang Bay, and Saltery Bay.

Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC qathet Regional District program wouldn't be possible without the generous support and funding from the Province of British Columbia, the qathet Regional District, City of Powell River, Powell River Community Forest, and the BC Conservation Foundation. Special thanks go to Patrick Devereaux, Manager of Operational Services, for his ongoing support of the WildSafeBC program in the qRD.

The WCC also wishes to thank the COS and Officer Leyland Klassen for their continued support. Further thanks to Juhli Jobi of Powell River Farmers Market for the venue opportunity to offer Bear Spray Use workshops. Lastly, a special thanks to Karin Westland, Outdoor Learning Coordinator of SD47, for their integral role to this programs success of the WRP this year. Their efforts to promote this program were met with overwhelming interest from teachers across the school district.