

BELLA COOLA ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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***Keeping Wildlife Wild and
Communities Safe***



**BRITISH
COLUMBIA**

Supported by the
Province of British Columbia



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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Bella Coola program for the 2024 season between April 22nd and November 30th. The main goal of the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator is to assist communities in preventing human-wildlife conflicts through educational programs, collaboration, and community solutions. The following report summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the 2024 season, and will help shape the delivery of the program for the 2025 based on coordinator, community, and sponsor needs.

Program Coverage Area

The WildSafeBC Bella Coola program covers approximately 70 square kilometers. Bella Coola is located in Nuxalk Territory, in the Central Coast region. The primary geographical structure of the community, both in terms of physical structures and population distribution, is the long, narrow Bella Coola River valley. The river meanders along the eastern and northern edges of the town before discharging into the head of North Bentinck Arm.



2024 Highlights

13

Students Educated

349

Community Members Reached

8

Community Event Booths

744

Facebook Users Reached

Conservation Officer Service Reports

2024 saw a wonderful return of pink salmon, the most significant in the valley in 5 years. Consequently bear conflict was at a record low this year with only two RAPP line calls received to the COS. Nuxalk Guardian Watchmen reported one incident involving a grizzly bear accessing garbage at Nuxalk College. WSBC Bella Coola assisted by providing bear-resistant bins to the college at a reduced rate.

Communications with the local COS have been very limited this season in light of the lack of conflict and due to the CO's paternity leave. I was unable to obtain previous years data but it is commonly known Bella Coola is a conflict hotspot therefore this news is welcomed.

While the salmon run will have influenced bear habitat use and conflict incidence it is worth noting that there has been a significant increase in electric fence installations in the valley. This coupled with consistent public messaging from WSBC I believe has also resulted in the low conflict reports.



Photo Credit: Visit Bella Coola

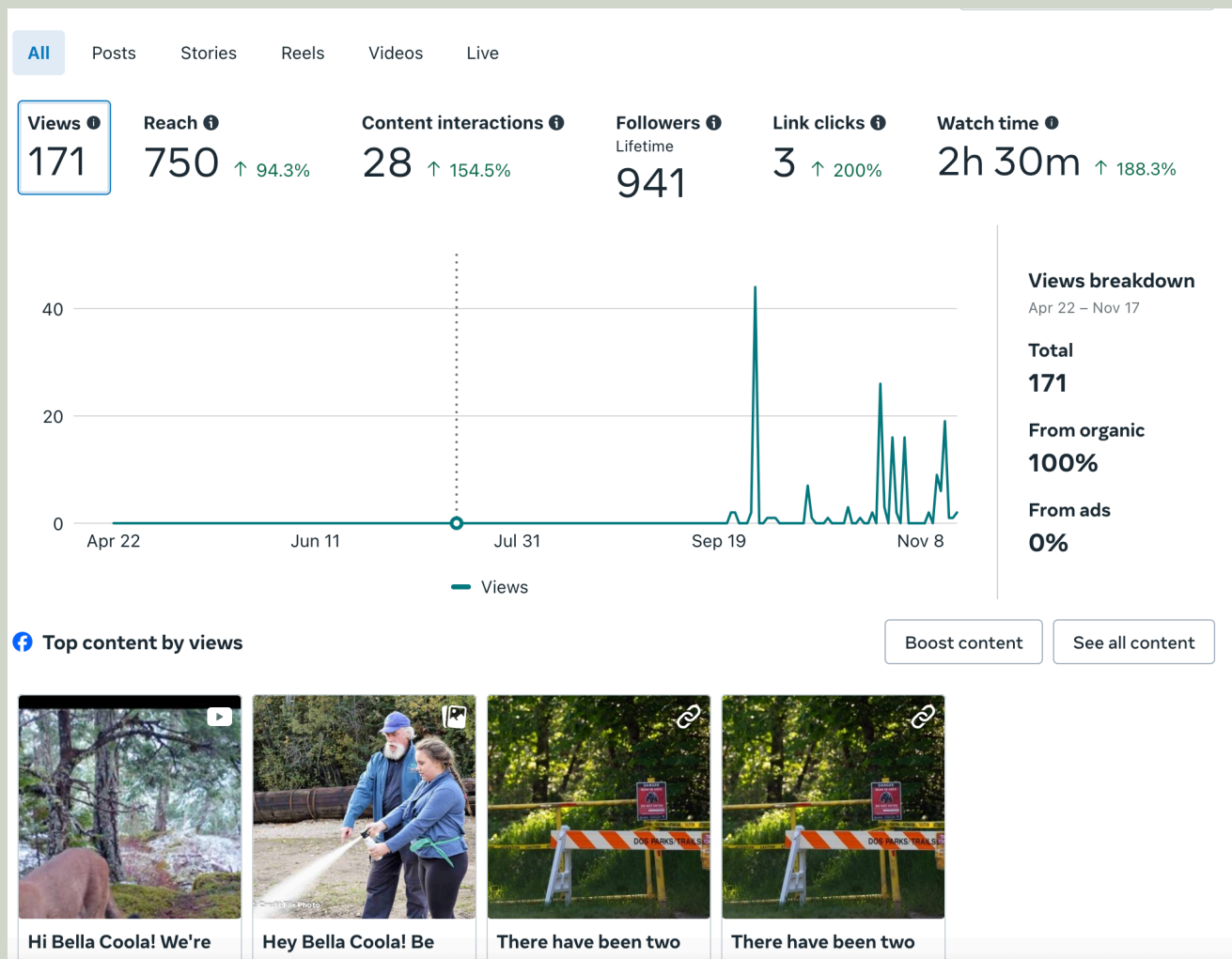
Display Booths

Display booths allow the public to view and interact with our educational materials, learn about wildlife safety, discuss wildlife attractant management, and network our program offerings to various groups of residents. In 2024, 350 people visited the WildSafeBC display booth at 8 community events across the community. These were primarily at the Farmer's Market, and one at an Indigenous People' Day event. People thoroughly enjoy the display items (bear skins, skulls, spoor prints), the video I play of local camera trap footage of wildlife is very popular, and otherwise many enjoy simply sharing stories with me about wildlife experiences and / or discussing conservation.



Social Media

The WildSafeBC Bella Coola Facebook page came out of hibernation on 27th April with an introductory post. Over the season, the page has had 48 new Facebook followers, from 894 followers in November 2023 to 942 followers in November 2024. Throughout the season, the WildSafe coordinator engaged with posts relating to wildlife activity and provided education and information to residents in community Facebook Page groups. This approach was an effective method to bring people in to explore our page and our content while continuing to provide engaging education. Many Facebook posts created were also shared by Facebook users into other groups or on their own personal timeline, which helped promote the WildSafeBC Bella Coola Facebook page. In total, 3 Facebook posts were created that reached 710 people from 27th April to November 30th. Issues with cross sharing on local Facebook pages made social media very challenging this season.



Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

WildSafe BC Bella Coola attended the Indigenous Peoples' Day event held by Nuxalk Nation and spoke with many residents about the importance of wildlife and respect for Nuxalk territory.



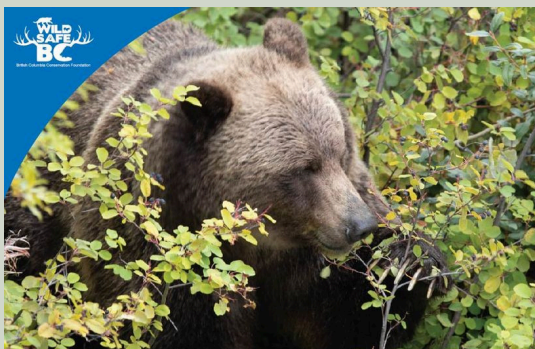
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Credit: nuxalknation.ca

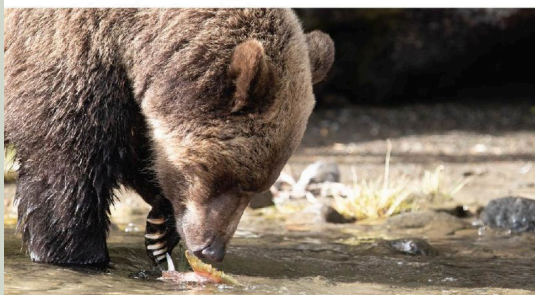
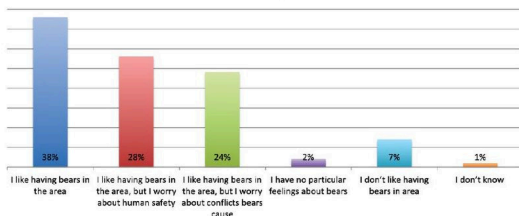
Challenges and Future Goals

Improperly managed garbage, pets / livestock and fruit trees, continue to be a source of human-wildlife conflict in Bella Coola. While some residents are familiar with conflict and how to prevent it, others are less aware of the risks of human-wildlife conflict. Continued outreach is needed to provide people with knowledge and skills on how to manage wildlife attractants and how to stay safe when in wildlife country. The WildSafe Bella Coola Community Coordinator recommends the following activities for 2025:

- Focus on wolf conflict reduction strategies and improving wolf perceptions
- Further promote electric fencing as a tool to reduce wildlife conflict
- More engagement with local School District 49 and WildSafe Ranger program
- Continue to work with the Conservation Officer Service and strengthen relationship



Which of the following best describes your feelings towards bears?
(n=188)



Bella Coola Bear Hazard Assessment

The purpose of a Bear Hazard Assessment (BHA) is to review the history and pattern of bear conflicts in a community and identify bear habitat, human-use areas and non-natural attractants. It is an important step for a community wishing to become Bear Smart and helps inform a Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan.

What are the key findings of the Bella Coola Valley BHA?

- Conflict hotspots in the Valley have been mapped and identified.
- Reports of bears have increased in recent years with highest numbers in 2018 and 2019.
- The most reported attractant groupings were fruit/gardens/compost, accounting for 53% of reports; followed by livestock/pets/feed.

What are the results of the Human-Bear Interaction Survey?

- There were 188 participants. Of these, over 90% like having bears in the valley but 24% had concerns regarding conflicts they may cause and 28% were concerned about public safety.
- Bear sightings are common in Bella Coola with over 40% of respondents having spotted bears more than 10 times on their property or street in the past three years.
- Many respondents felt that unsecured attractants (e.g. fruit trees) and poor natural food availability (e.g. salmon returns) had led to increases in conflict.
- Over 87% of respondents felt that the Bear Smart Community Program is important and work should continue to prevent conflicts by addressing the root causes.
- Many respondents stated they would use electric fencing to prevent bears from accessing fruit trees but the cost was a barrier to some.

Next steps and recommendations moving forward:

- WildSafeBC will continue to work with the community and Bella Coola Valley Human-Bear Safety Committee to support finalizing a Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan and its implementation.
- Work will continue to support residents in managing their fruit trees to prevent access by bears including facilitating electric fencing workshops.
- WildSafeBC will continue ongoing education with community members on adopting best practices to prevent human-bear conflicts and support efforts to become a Bear Smart Community.
- WildSafeBC will continue to provide bear safety talks and training workshops.
- Collaborations will continue to grow with other organizations, businesses, and local governments, on finding solutions to improve community safety and prevent bears from getting into conflict.

Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC Bella Coola Coordinator would like to thank Nuxalkmc for allowing us to work in their unceded, traditional territory, the Province of British Columbia, and the BC Conservation Foundation for funding the WildSafeBC Bella Coola project. Thank you to the Conservation Officer Service for their direction and support of the program. Lastly, the WildSafeBC Kamloops Coordinator would like to send an enormous thank you to all the British Columbia Conservation Foundation staff and fellow provincial WildSafeBC Community Coordinators for their encouragement and support. This program would not be able to succeed without the collaboration of all those mentioned.

Thank You!



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