

COWICHAN VALLEY ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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*Keeping Wildlife Wild and
Communities Safe*



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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley program for the 2024 season between April 23rd, 2024 and November 30th, 2024. 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 Cowichan Valley program covers approximately 3473 square kilometers. WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley acknowledges that it operates on the unceded traditional territories of the Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Malahat First Nation, Penelakut Tribe, and Stz'uminus First Nation. The program covers the communities of Chemainus, Duncan, Cowichan Lake, Youbou, Cobble Hill, Malahat and Shawnigan Lake.



2024 Highlights

934

Students Educated

1789

Community Events + Trailhead Booth

673

Households through Door-to-Door

669

Bins Tagged

19.4k

Facebook Users Reached

Conservation Officer Service Reports

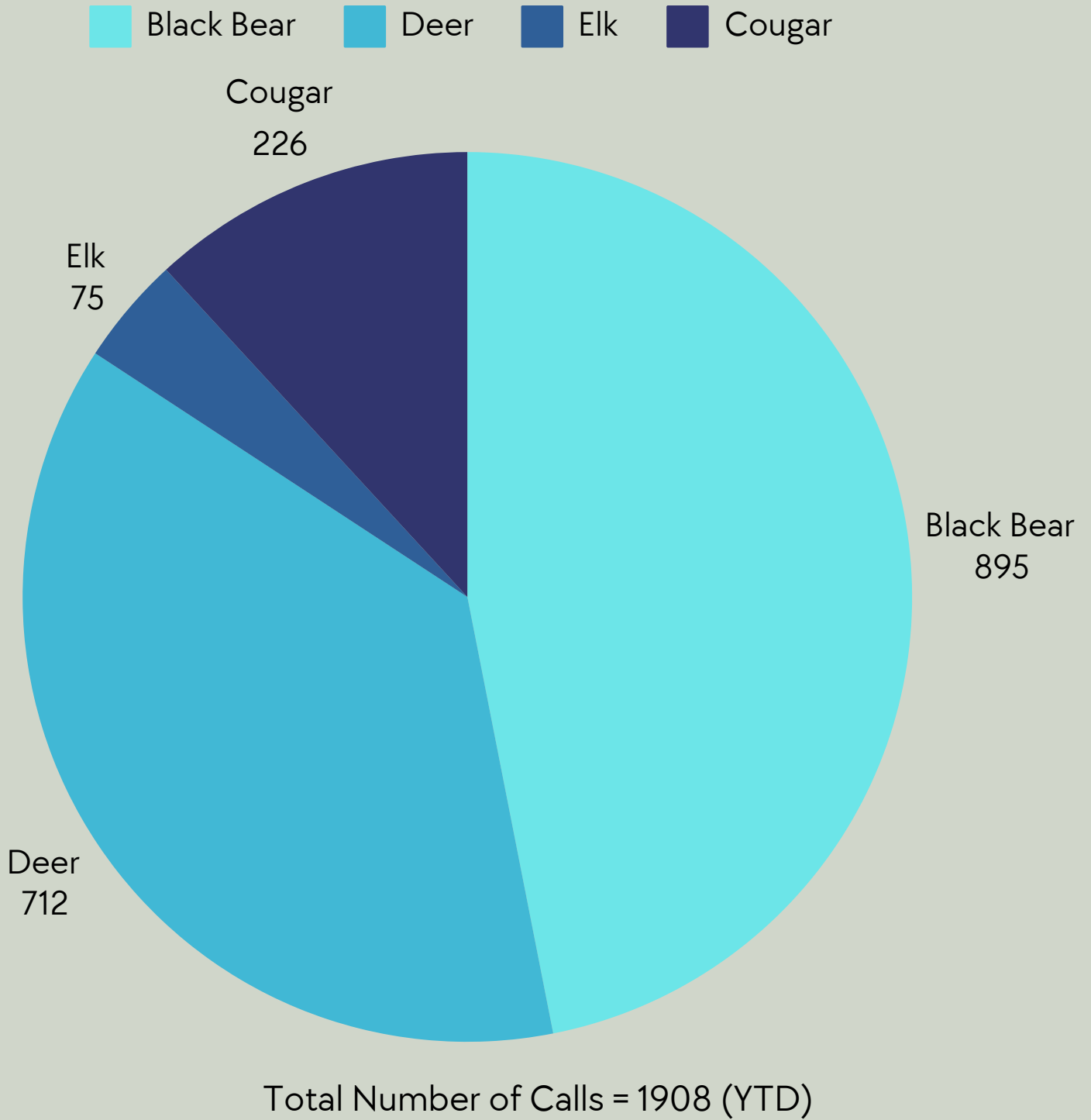
From January 1 to November 30, a total of **1908** wildlife reports have been made to the COS through the Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) line (1-877-952-7277) or online form (<https://forms.gov.bc.ca/environment/rapp/>).

Similar to previous years, black bears were the species most often reported to the COS in 2024, followed by Deer, Cougar and Elk. From January 1st, 2024 to November 30th, 2024, there were **895** black bear reports, which is lower by 416 than the number of reports made in 2023, which was 1311.

This year a lot of impetus was placed early in the season i.e in the months of May, June and July to spread education and awareness in the community through multiple channels of engagement.



Conservation Officer Service Reports



WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program introduces students to the concept of human-wildlife conflict and encourages them to take an active role in reducing human-wildlife conflict at home by helping their families identify backyard wildlife attractants. In addition, students learn how to have a safe and respectful relationship with wildlife. The program complements the BC Science K-9 Curriculum. The WildSafe Cowichan Valley coordinator delivered 29 WRP presentations with 6 elementary schools as well as 1 Camp and 1 Open school. A total of **934** children throughout Cowichan Valley became WildSafe Rangers and received a WildSafe Ranger kit to take away with them.

School/Group (Presentations)	Grade	# Reached	Date
Chemanius Elementary School (6)	1-7	227	June 10
George Bonner Elementary School (5)	K-7	234	June 11 and June 14
Queen Margret School (3)	3-7	75	June 13
VIRL Cowichan	Mixed	31	July 4
Evergreen Independent School (3)	K-7	97	Sept 19
Bench Elementary School (1)	1	23	Oct 30
Girls Guide Group -Camp Creina (3)	Mixed	89	Nov 2
Ladysmith Primary School (4)	K-7	108	Nov 6
Cowichan Valley Open Learning - The Grove (4)	K-7	50	Nov 12 & 13

Community Groups

The WCC gave 6 in-person presentations to **115** people across various community groups in the region. These presentations were focused on local Wildlife Awareness and Safety combined with Bear Spray use and safety. Two of these presentations were given to the Malahat Nation as well as one presentation was given to 21 summer staff / instructors hired by CVRD Parks and Recreation department who further helped in spreading awareness to many more children and adults in the Cowichan Valley in the season of 2024.

Community Group	Attendees	Date
Kerry Park Recreation Center - Mill Bay	23	June 25
Malahat Nation Presentation	34	July 18 and August 19
VIRL Cowichan and South Cowichan	58	July 4, 27, August 6 & 13



Display Booths - Event and Trailhead

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, more than **1464** people visited the WildSafeBC display booth at **9** community events across the community.

There were various amazing interactions conducted with the community members where the significance of education in reducing human-wildlife conflicts was at the core. Many kids and adults alike were really appreciative of the set-up including bear skull and hide.

Community Event	Attendees	Date
Duncan Farmer's Market	104	May 25
Honeymoon Bay Farmer's Market	74	June 9
Chemanius Canada Day Event	789	July 1
Weir and river Stewardship - Lake Cowichan	27	July 20
Honeymoon Bay Day	78	July 20
VIRL Chemainus Booth & Raptors Event	35 & 46	July 10 & July 23
Youbou Regatta	176	August 10
Cowichan Tribes (Rivers Day Event)	135	Sept 22

Display Booths - Event and Trailhead

This year the WCC also put up display booths at various trailheads to connect with the public to spread awareness and education about wildlife safety as well as discuss wildlife attractant management. In 2024, more than **325** people visited the WildSafeBC display booth at **9** trailheads across the community.

Community Event / Trailhead Booth	Attendees	Date
Diana, Princess of Wales, Wilderness Park	15	May 27
Cowichan Valley Trailhead - Chemanius	23	June 11
Cowichan Valley Trailhead - Duncan	25	July 4
Mt. Tzhouhalem (Kaspa Rd)	65	July 6
Transfers Beach Booth	57	July 14
Osborne Bay/ Maple Mountain Trailhead	33	July 27
Holland Creek Trailhead	36	August 3
S'amunu Marsh Conservation Area	28	August 6
Chemanius Lake Park Trailhead	20	August 17
CVT - Trans Canada Trail - Western Terminus	23	Nov 4

Bin Tagging and Door-to-Door

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of curbside containers the evening before collection day. During **15** outings, a total of **669** bins were tagged across various garbage collection zones across all major hotspots from Ladysmith to Mill Bay / Shawnigan Lake as well as Maple Bay, Duncan to Lake Cowichan and Youbou. Furthermore, WCC collaborated with Lake Cowichan Bear Aware Group (Volunteer Group) where **100+** bins were tagged and WCC supported the efforts across Lake Cowichan neighbourhoods which had a lot of Wildlife Conflicts.

During the Door-to-door education outreach efforts **673** door hangers were placed throughout the community. Moreover, the WildSafeBC Coordinator also engaged with **77** residents in conversations about wildlife awareness and safety in those neighbourhoods and discussed attractant management strategies to reduce human-wildlife conflicts.

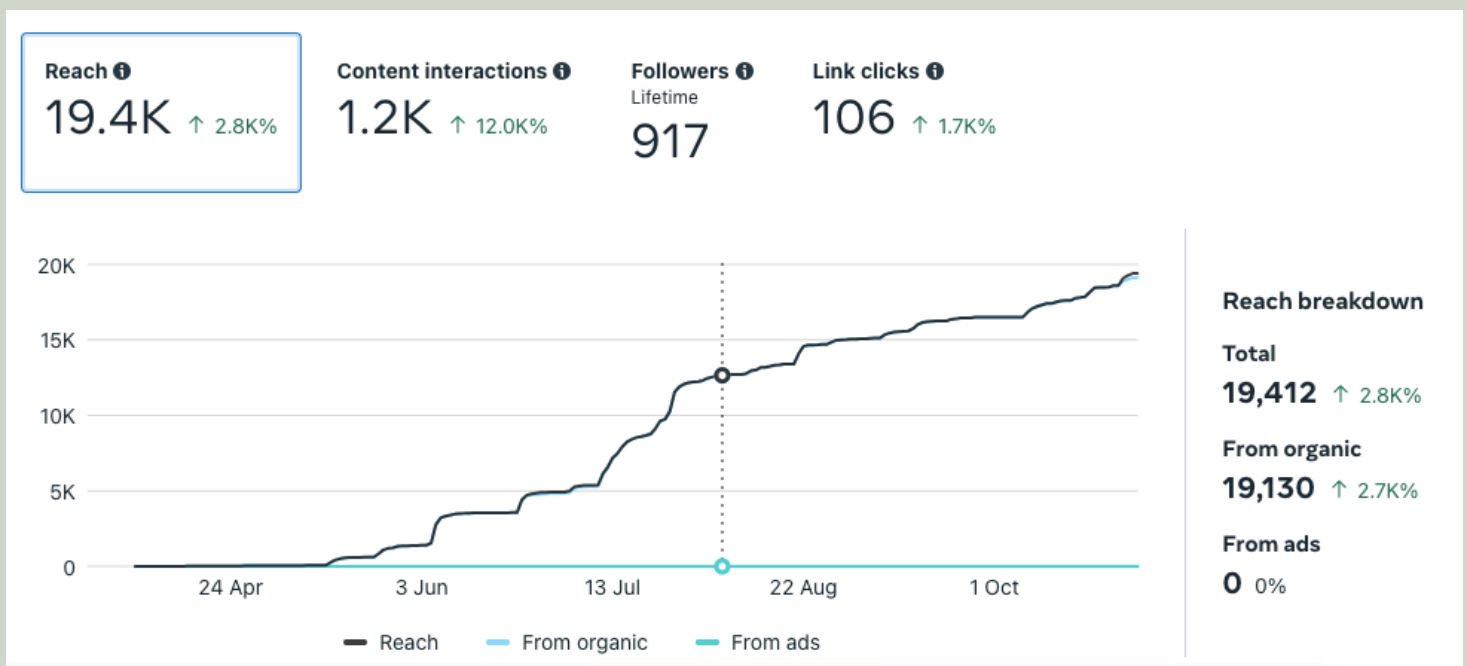


Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley's Facebook page came out of hibernation on April 24, 2024 with an introductory post. Over the season, the page has had **65** new Facebook followers, from 852 followers in November 2023 to **917** followers in November 2024. As well, the page has received **804** Facebook Page likes during this same time period.

Throughout the season, the WildSafeBC 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 Cowichan Valley's Facebook page.

In total, **69** Facebook posts were created that reached **19.4K** people from April 24, 2024 to November 30th. Many posts reached over **1.2K** Facebook users, with the most impactful post created was Oct 20, 2024 reaching approximately **4,597** people and was shared **32** times.



Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to set 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.

This year the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator tried to promote the WildSafeBC Business Pledge to many business(s) in the region as per the table. However, despite the initial interest shown by various organizations they didn't sign the pledge.

Business Name	Locality
Farmship Co-op Growers	Ladysmith
Thai Pinto Restaurant	Chemainus
Duncan Farmer's Market	Duncan
Van Isle Cowichan RV Park & Camping	Duncan
reFresh Cowichan	Duncan
Country Grocer	Lake Cowichan
Invitation Indian Restaurant	Chemainus

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 WildSafeBC Coordinator visited **4 camping spots** and connected with their employees and representatives to have discussion and plan for Wildlife - Human Conflicts and Attractant Management strategies. During the visit **63** campsites were visited and some discussions took place with the campers about campsite management. A lot of Bare Camping materials was shared with those campsites as an education tool for future campers at these locations.

Further efforts were made to jointly work with BC Parks at Cowichan River and Bamberton Provincial Park to have an educational booth of WildSafeBC. However, nothing has percolated as of now and would now be something to work in future.

Campsites Approached / Visited	Locality
Chemainus River Campground	Chemainus
Country Maple RV Resort	Chemainus
Van Isle Cowichan RV Park & Camping	Duncan
Cowichan River Campground	Duncan

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

During the 2024 season, the WCC tried to collaborate with various First Nations such as Cowichan Tribes, Malahat First Nation and Stz'umius First Nation regarding spreading awareness and education about human-wildlife conflict and WildSafe BC messaging. This resulted in 2 community presentations at Malahat First Nation followed by discussions with elders and community members on attractant management. Furthermore, a lot of resources were shared with all the members and attendees. Similarly, with Cowichan Tribes, the WCC had a joint meeting with COS and Cowichan Tribes members and they were also given a lot of materials and resources to be shared among the community. On September 22, 2024, Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Stewardship Roundtable hosted a celebration in honour of Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul (Cowichan River Day) and WildSafeBC was invited to attend the event and set up an information booth for the community members. The event had a diverse range of community members who attended and many connections were fostered. Also, the WCC did complete the Indigenous corporate training as a part of learning and development. This training provided a lot of important learnings and understanding to support the Truth and Reconciliation efforts and working with First Nations.



Photo by Barry Hetschko

Quw'utsun Sta'lo' Skweyul (Cowichan River Day)

BC Goes Wild

Throughout September when human-bear conflicts are at their highest in BC, WildSafeBC celebrates its annual BC Goes Wild campaign to acknowledge the spectacular diversity of wildlife in the Province. This year WildSafe celebrated it's **9th Annual BC Goes Wild Event**.

For BC Goes Wild, many "BC is Wildlife Country" posters and many wildlife signs were placed strategically all around key hotspots such as Transfers Beach, Holland Creek Trailhead, Information Center - Duncan, Ladysmith, Chemainus, Mill Bay and Lake Cowichan, Lady Diana Wilderness Park, Downtown Chemainus, VIRL - Cowichan, Maple Mountain Trailhead, Maple Bay Intersection, Duncan Downtown, Mill Bay Intersection, Cowichan Valley Trail, Camp Creina, Thrifty Foods, Country Grocer and many other key significant areas so that people can be aware of the wildlife in the area.

Also, on social media, many posts and content was posted around the BC Goes Wild Event during the entire month of September 2024 to spread awareness and education across the community members.



Challenges and Future Goals

Waste continues to be the largest source of attractants in the Cowichan Valley. The region covered by the WCC is quite a large geographical area and has five waste removal systems, each with separate schedules of removal. Another challenge to waste collection is early placement of bins. An effective solution to this has been Bin-Tagging and educating residents through door-to-door engagement in 2024. Furthermore, fruit trees, bird feeders, and urban livestock continue to be a source of human-wildlife conflict in Cowichan Valley. 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.

Another issue relevant in Cowichan Valley is Elk populations in Lake Cowichan, Youbou and neighbouring areas. Currently, WildSafeBC has no pamphlets and information on Elk Safety, which would be an excellent addition to the information booklets in these areas.

Therefore, on the basis of above, the WildSafe Cowichan Valley Coordinator recommends the following activities for 2025:

- Develop shared strategies and outcomes through the regional Bear Working Group
- Engaging more volunteering opportunities with high school students to spread the awareness and education throughout the community
- Deliver more workshops on bear spray, electric fencing, and tracking wildlife
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards of not managing attractants and solutions for residents through WildSafe Ranger programming, social media, news articles, and presentations
- Increase presence at community events and information tables in popular spots around the valley
- Increase door-to-door canvassing and garbage tagging campaigns in hotspots
- Continue to promote Bare Camping and Business Pledges to build the community awareness around WildSafeBC messaging
- Develop materials relevant to the community and share the same with members

Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley Community Coordinator would like to thank the Cowichan Valley Regional District, Municipality of North Cowichan, Town of Lake Cowichan and Town of Ladysmith, the Province of British Columbia, and the BC Conservation Foundation for funding the WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley project.

Furthermore, Thank you to the Conservation Officer Service for their direction and support of the program, including Sgt. Scott Norris, Mark Kissinger and Archer Peters (WSRO). Lastly, the WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley 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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