

FERNIE ELK VALLEY SOUTH COUNTRY ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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*Keeping Wildlife Wild and
Communities Safe*

SPARWOOD

FERNIE
BRITISH COLUMBIA

elkford
Wild at heart.

Regional District of
East Kootenay

Columbia Basin **trust**



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Table of Contents

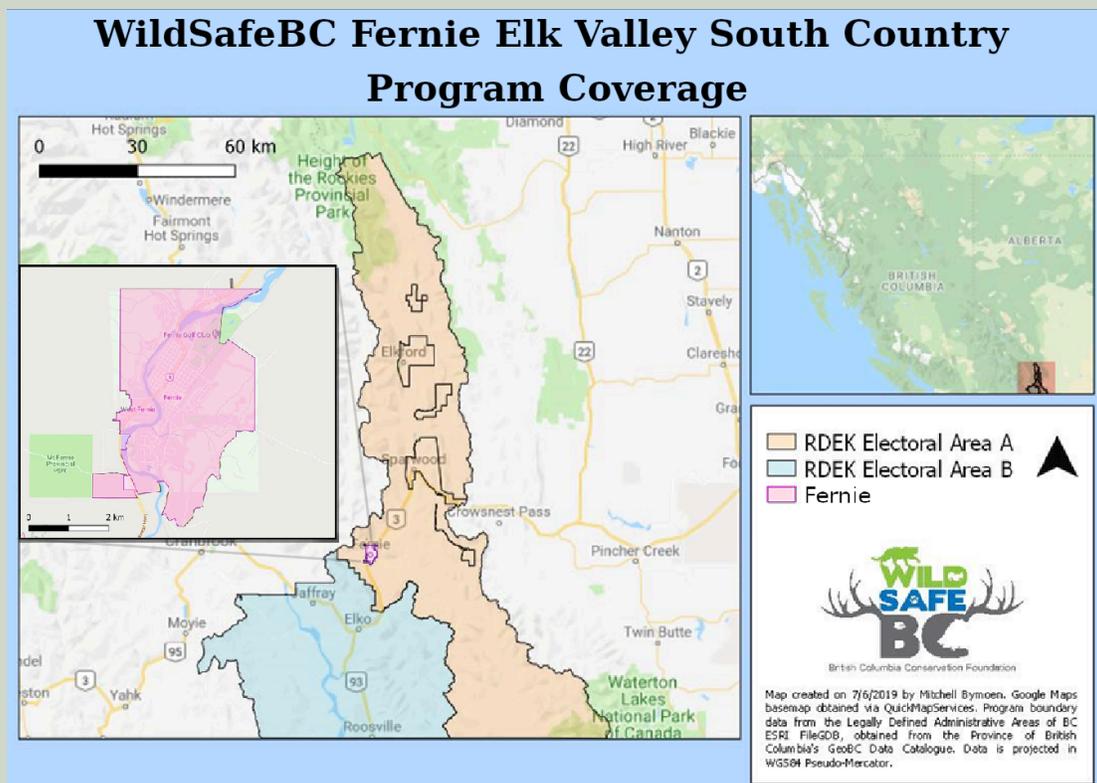
Executive Summary.....	1
Program Coverage Area/Map.....	1
2024 Highlights.....	2
Conservation Officer Service Reports.....	3, 4
WildSafe Ranger Program.....	5
Community Groups.....	6
Display Booths.....	7
Bin-Tagging and Door-To-Door.....	8
Social Media.....	9
BC Goes Wild.....	10
Bare Campsite Program.....	11
Challenges and Future Goals.....	12
Acknowledgements.....	13

Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Fernie Elk Valley South Country program for the 2024 season between April 10th 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 Fernie Elk Valley South Country program covers RDEK Areas A and B, approximately 7800 square kilometers, around 300 of which are incorporated under the districts of Fernie, Sparwood and Elkford. Located in the Southeastern most corner of the province, the area spans alpine, subalpine and montane ecosystems and encompass a number of critically important wildlife corridors. This program operates on the unceded territory of the Ktunaxa Nation, who have been stewards of this land since time immemorial.



2024 Highlights

540

Students Educated

991

Community Members Reached

9

Community Event Booths

109

Bins Tagged

2405

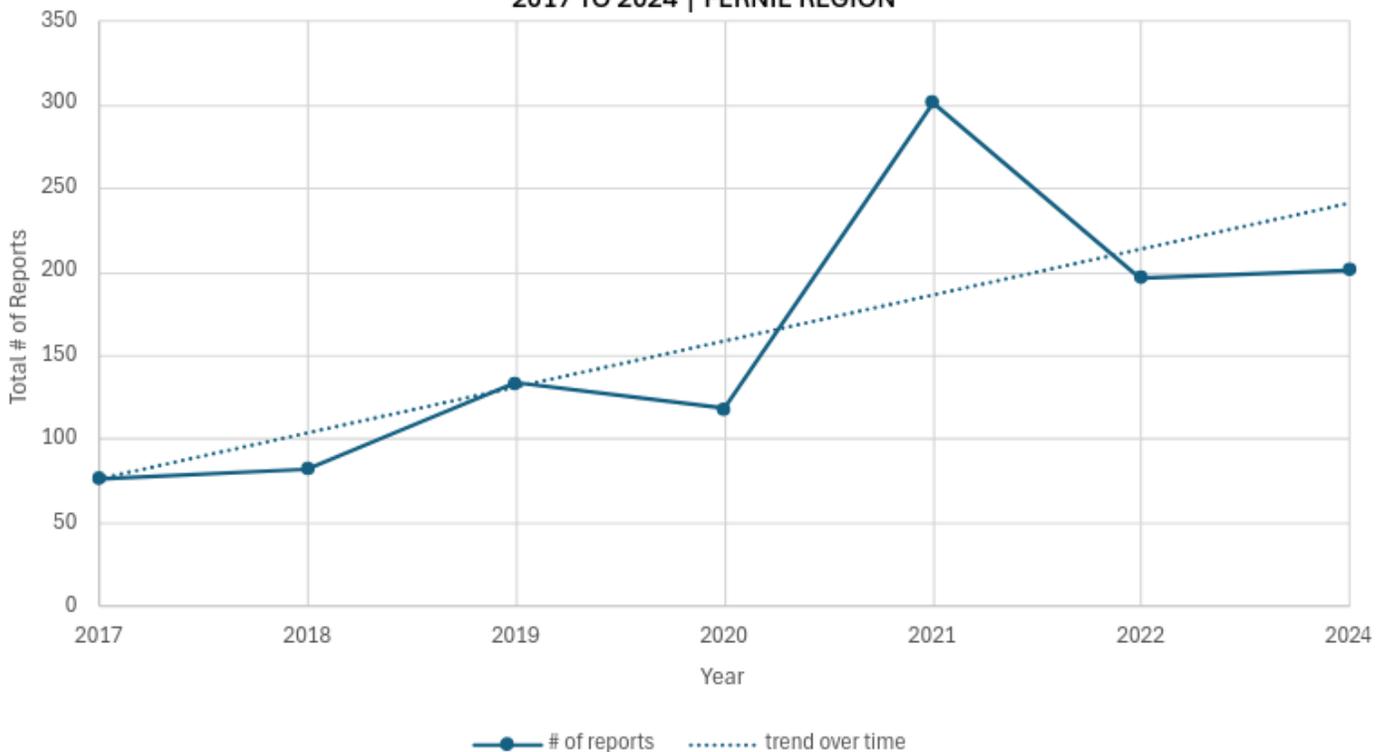
Facebook Users Reached

Conservation Officer Service Reports

From January 1st to October 31st, a total of 500 wildlife reports were made across the program area 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/>).

As in previous years, black bears were the species most often reported to the COS in 2024, totaling 201 reports between January 1st and October 31st. This is higher than the average of 151 set between 2017 and 2022* for the same 10 month period, but lower than the peak of 301 reports in 2021. These numbers can be impacted not only by the frequency of human wildlife conflict, but also by changes in the ability or willingness of the public to report said conflict. From these data alone it is not possible to differentiate between those two factors, but the upward trend in number of reports still represents a growing problem that has and will continue to negatively impact communities and the ecosystems they are a part of.

**TOTAL BLACK BEAR REPORTS TO COS BETWEEN JANUARY 1 AND OCTOBER 31
2017 TO 2024 | FERNIE REGION**

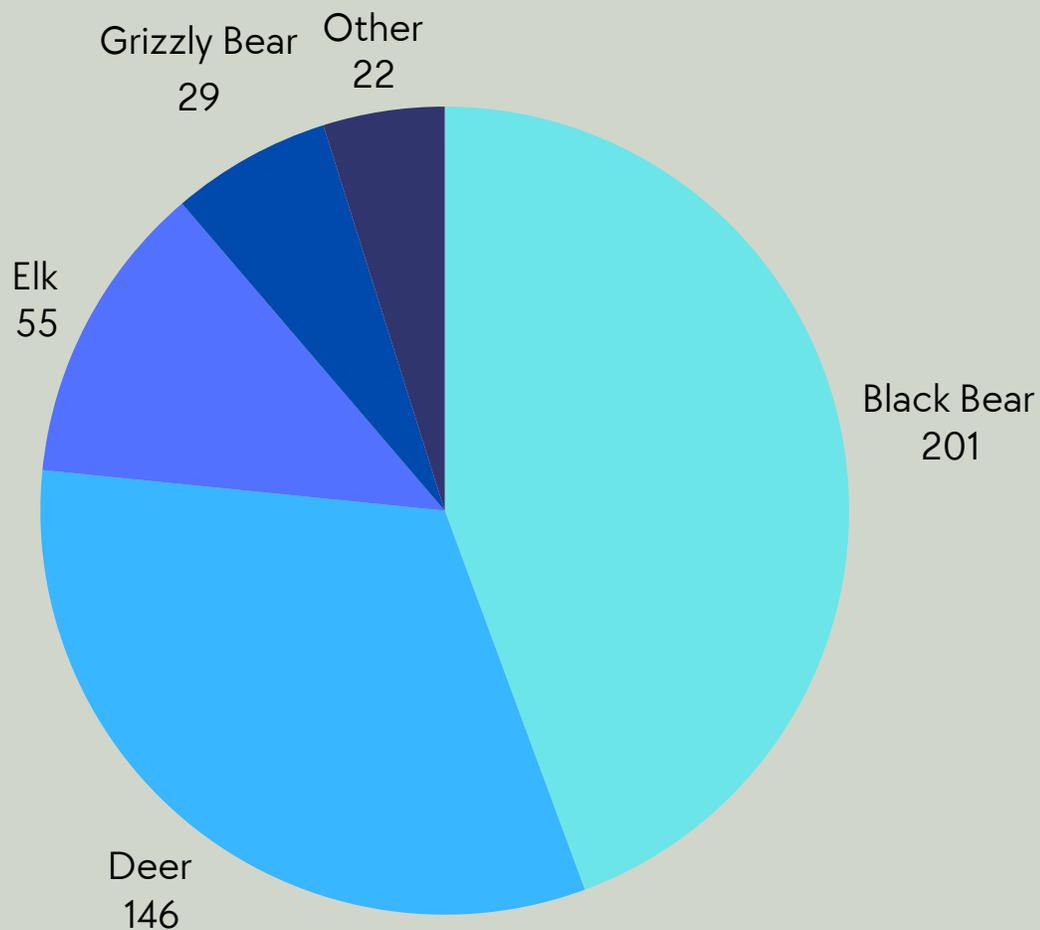


**Data from 2023 have been omitted due to inaccuracies resulting from the shutdown of the Wildlife Awareness Reporting Program (WARP), from which previous data were collected.*

Conservation Officer Service Reports

In 2024 between January 1st and October 31st, the top 5 most reported categories across the program area were Black Bear, Deer (either species), Elk, Grizzly Bear, and "Other", a catch-all for infrequently reported animals which are not given their own category (i.e not deer, bears, elk, wild sheep, cougars, coyotes, moose, raptors, foxes, bobcats, mountain goats, skunks, or wolves). The statistics do not identify the species from the reports recorded as Other, but this category would theoretically include reports of the badger seen in Sparwood this fall, for example.

Black bears are commonly the most reported species in communities across BC, as they are both relatively abundant and more drawn to human settlements than other large predators. This is true for grizzlies as well, although to a lesser extent. In this region deer and elk are ubiquitous in and around towns and cities, where they may be reported for aggressive behavior, property damage, entanglement, vehicle collisions, or signs of Chronic Wasting Disease and other maladies.



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 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. Older students also learn more advanced skills about bear spray and responsible camping. Some presentations in Elkford were a collaboration with Bylaw Enforcement. The WildSafeBC Fernie Elk Valley South Country coordinator delivered 14 WRP presentations to students from Pre-K up to Gr.10. Over 500 youth became WildSafe Rangers and received a WildSafe Ranger kit to take away with them.

School/Group	Grade	# Reached	Date
Strong Start (Fernie)	Pre-K	12	May 23
Bright Beginnings (Fernie)	Pre-K	32	June 11
École Isabella Dicken Elementary (Fernie)	K & 3	163	June 17, September 26
Outdoor Connections (Fernie)	Pre-K to 2	39	September 17, 20, 25
Rocky Mountain Elementary (Elkford)	K to 4	60	October 18 , 23
Fernie Secondary School	7 & 10	46	September 27, October 1
Fernie Academy	1 to 7	145	October 21, 22
Laugh & Learn Sparwood	Pre-K	17	November 21

Community Groups

A wide variety of groups received WildSafeBC workshops this year, a collective XXX individuals from Fernie, Sparwood and Elkford. Staff trainings took place at Wapiti Playschool, Fernie Alpine Resort, Mainroad Sparwood, Columbia Basin Family Resource Society, and the Fernie Public Works department. These trainings covered wildlife safety and bear spray training, as well as job-specific scenarios as required.

Two public bear spray training sessions in Elkford gave more than 20 people the opportunity to learn proper handling and deployment using inert spray. Students enrolled in the Mountain Adventure Skills Training program at College of the Rockies also received hands-on training with inert spray.

Finally, WildSafeBC worked with the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy to deliver critical wildlife safety information to newcomer families across the valley.



Display Booths

Display booths allow the public to view and interact with our educational materials, learn about wildlife safety, discuss wildlife attractant management, ask questions, and network our program offerings to diverse groups of residents and visitors. In 2024, more than 850 people visited a WildSafeBC display booth at 9 community events held in Fernie, Sparwood, Elkford, Jaffray and Baynes Lake. These events included community information nights, Wildfire Preparedness Day, Fernie Family Safety Day, and local Farmers' Markets. Booths were a unique opportunity to reach both locals and tourists to provide information, who all contribute to the safety of our communities in different ways. This is especially important for the sustainability and reputation of the tourism industry, as well as the ecosystems that support it. In Fernie, market booths were presented in collaboration with AmbassadorWILD, which aided with cross-promotion and expanding the wealth of information offered to market patrons. Booths also presented a great opportunity to promote local initiatives and programs such as fruit tree management grants and updated solid waste collection.



Bin Tagging and Door-to-Door

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of curbside containers found to be out early the evening before collection day. During 5 outings, a total of 109 bins were tagged: 19 in Fernie and 90 Sparwood. In both communities, all residences that are zoned for curbside pickup were surveyed. In Elkford, Bylaw used a similar system to engage with residents, as all three communities have laws against placing bins out before collection day.

In Fernie where bin tagging has been taking place for many years, the number of infractions detected each year remains low. This year only 1 property was a repeat from previous years, suggesting that most properties that receive a sticker heed the warning. In Sparwood both the number of tags issued and the number of repeat properties (10) are higher, but this is likely because of an increase in bin tagging activity, which only expanded to cover the entire community as of last year.

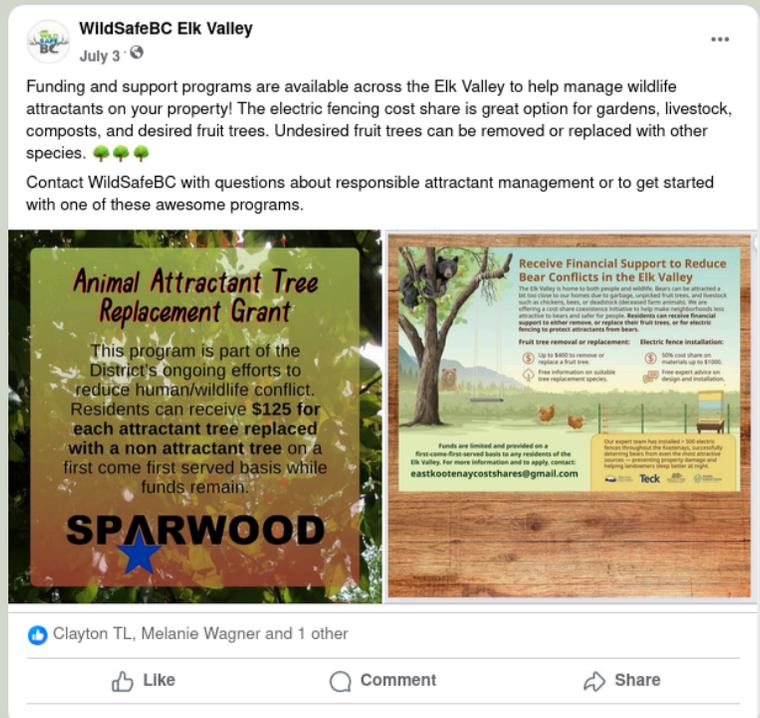
Door-to-door education also reached 80 households with door hangers in Fernie, in response to a number of incidents with bears and unsecured garbage along James White Park as reported both by the City and concerned residents.



Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Fernie Elk Valley South Country Facebook page came out of hibernation on May 21st with an introductory post. The page is currently has 1303 followers. 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. The page was also used to help promote local initiatives and organizations . In total, 40 Facebook posts were created that reached over 2400 people from May 21st to November 30th.

WildSafeBC information was also shared over the airwaves on 2DayFM twice during the fall, to correspond with the start of peak conflict season for bears.



Home > News > East Kootenay News > WildSafeBC urging public to be mindful of bear attractants this fall

East Kootenay News

WildSafeBC urging public to be mindful of bear attractants this fall

By R McCormack October 2, 2024

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.

This year WildSafeBC developed some new materials for youth, including the new colouring sheets which were used in a regional all-ages colouring contest. The colouring sheets were made available online and at public locations. The contest produced 4 winners across 4 age categories, chosen by random draw. The prizes for the contest were purchased exclusively from small local businesses.



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.

Mount Fernie Park continued to participate in the program this year. In conversations with campers, the initiative was very well-received, and succeeded in making campers feel safer during their stay. The Elkford Municipal Campground also expressed interest in joining the program at the end of the season, and are considering it for 2025.

Bare Camping brochures were also made available at appropriate locations throughout the region and at all local events attended by the coordinator. These resources are especially handy for the large number of unserviced and back-country campsites that remain very popular, as well as any private campsites that are not currently participating in the program.

WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program

Your campsite #: _____ Vehicle #: _____
 Was reviewed on: _____ at: _____
 (date) (time)

Congratulations!
 Your site is considered a "bare" campsite for this date.
 Thank you for helping keep wildlife wild and your campground safe.

WARNING!
 Your site could use some improvement.
 Please review the Bare Campsite Program best practices and take care of the following concerns:

ALERT!
 Attractants were left unattended and can draw wildlife to your campsite.
 Please secure in a hard-sided vehicle or food lockers if provided.

WILD SAFE BC
 British Columbia Conservation Foundation
 Report wildlife in conflict to the Conservation Officer Service at 1.877.952.7277.
www.wildsafebc.com

Camping in Wildlife Country

"BARE" CAMPSITES ARE SAFE CAMPSITES

"At Risk" Campsite
 Anything that has an odour can attract wildlife. Never leave these items unattended or bring them into your sleeping area. This includes:

- Food and items used in food preparation
- Coolers whether empty or full
- Garbage and wrappings
- Pet food and bowls
- Bottles, cans and recyclables
- Deodorant, toothpaste, citronella etc.

"Bare" Campsite
 Keep a "bare" campsite to keep you and your camping neighbours safe.

- Keep all attractants in your vehicle or use storage lockers if provided - NEVER in your tent.
- Dispose of grey water in designated areas or at least 50 m from sleeping area.
- Prepare food at designated sites.
- Dispose of garbage and recyclables promptly at designated sites.

Never approach or feed wildlife.
 Doing so can lead to conflicts and tragic consequences where people or animals are injured or killed.

WILD SAFE BC
 British Columbia Conservation Foundation
 Learn more about wildlife and safety wildsafebc.com

Report all conflicts with wildlife to the BC Conservation Officer Service: 1.877.952.7277

'BARE' CAMPING

WILD SAFE BC
 British Columbia Conservation Foundation

Keep a "bare" campsite to keep you and your camping neighbours safe.

Keep all attractants in your vehicle or use storage lockers if provided - NEVER in your tent.

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Prepare food at designated sites.

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Challenges and Future Goals

Improperly managed garbage, fruit trees, bird feeders, and urban livestock continue to be a source of human-wildlife conflict throughout the Elk Valley and South Country. 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. Specific local challenges include reaching seasonal residents and visitors, promoting responsible fruit tree management or removal/replacement, and providing education and alternatives to shift workers whose work hours clash with solid waste pickup schedules. The WildSafeBC Fernie Elk Valley South Country Coordinator recommends the following activities for 2025:

- Continue to find new locations to leave information, especially in areas frequented by tourists and in the South Country
- Expand the reach of social media posts by engaging with local and government pages
- Reach out to additional campgrounds about adopting the Bare Campsite program
- Participate in community-led projects such as Elkford's Urban Wildlife Committee
- Provide settlement workers with newcomer resources using accessible language for English learners and provide an ongoing opportunity to offer support to families
- Attend community information nights
- Utilize public interfacing to support municipal initiatives and pass along public feedback to policy makers if desired
- Continue efforts to collaborate with Bylaw, such as through joint school presentations
- Maintain partnerships with Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, AmbassadorWILD, Wildsight, Biodiversity Pathways, FireSmart BC

Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator would like to thank the Regional District of the East Kootenays, The District of Elkford, The City of Fernie, The District of Sparwood, The Columbia Basin Trust, the Province of British Columbia, and the BC Conservation Foundation for funding the WildSafeBC Fernie Elk Valley South Country project. Thank you to the Conservation Officer Service for their direction and support of the program, as well as Bylaw Officers Kramer, Leach, Strasser, and Wiedrick, who have been so generous with their time in helping make the program a success. Huge thank you as well to large carnivore specialist Sean O'Donovan, Clayton Lamb and the team at Biodiversity Pathways, Fernie's AmbassadorWILD team, Miwa Ito with the COS, Tracey Halliday and the Elkford Urban Wildlife Committee, the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, and everyone in these amazing communities who engaged with the program. Lastly, the 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 successful without the collaboration of all those mentioned.

Thank You!



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