

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2023

## Nelson & RDCK Area E

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BRITISH COLUMBIA  
CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

## Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Nelson Program between April 15 and November 30, 2023. The program covers the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) management zones E and F, including the City of Nelson and the smaller unincorporated communities from Balfour to Bonnington (Figure 1). The program is located within the unceded traditional territories of the Sinixt, Ktunaxa, and Sylix peoples.

This season was notable for the appearance of a grizzly bear family in Uphill and Mountain Station in September, as well as zero reports of black bear's destroyed due to human-wildlife conflict compared to 2022 (as per local COS). Attractant management continued to be a challenge this season with garbage and fruit trees being the primary causes of human-wildlife conflicts.

The returning WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing human conflict with wildlife in the community. The WCC delivered the following activities in 2023:

- 9 WildSafe Ranger presentations to 430 youth.
- Delivered 8 wildlife awareness and safety presentations to 291 people.
- Reached 750 people at display booths at community events and parks
- Left over 513 door hangers.
- Tagged 43 residential garbage bins placed curbside the night before collection.
- 103 social media posts with 675 new followers, at least 10 news articles in the Nelson Star, The Nelson Daily, CBC and Global News, along with 4 radio appearances with The Bridge FM and Bounce Radio.
- Signed 2 new prominent local businesses to the WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program.
- Made 2 video appearances for the City of Nelson educational videos.

Thanks to generous funding from the Province of British Columbia, the Columbia Basin Trust, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the BC Conservation Foundation, and the City of Nelson, the WildSafeBC Nelson program accomplished many education outreach goals in 2023. Moving forward, the WildSafeBC Nelson Program will need to continue to deliver education, provide solutions, and facilitate collaborations to address unsecured wildlife attractants and continue efforts to “keep wildlife wild and communities safe”.

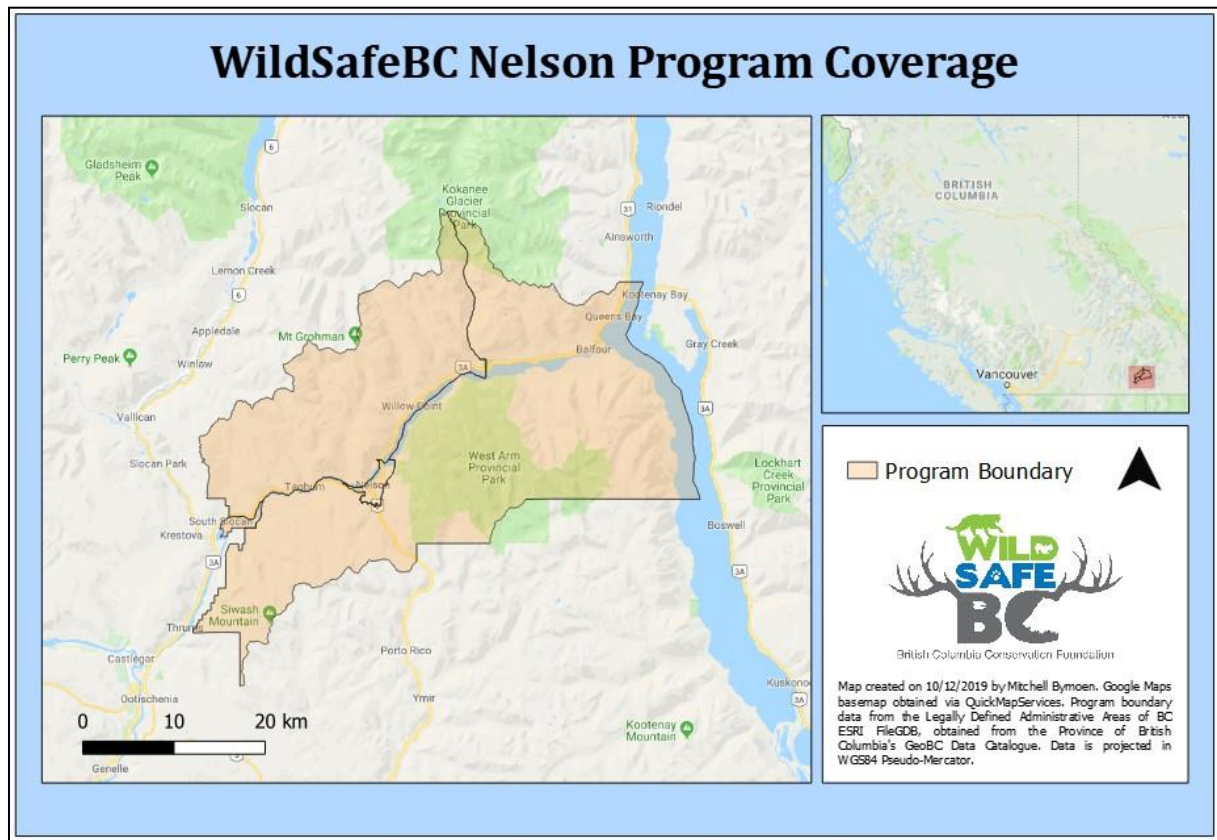


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Nelson coverage area.

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**Cover Photo:** Black bear cub photographed by Paula Wallis Photography. This wildlife photographer has graciously allowed the use of her wildlife images for use specifically for WildSafeBC Nelson.

## Highlights from 2023 Season

### WildSafe Ranger Program



The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict and engages youth to become more aware of their impact on local wildlife (Figure 2). A total of 432 students from six schools, pre-school to Grade 8 became WildSafe Rangers (Table 1). Over the season, the WCC hosted WRP presentations within school grounds and during class field trips to Cottonwood Lake and Kokanee Creek Provincial Park. (Figure 3). Students learned about local wildlife biology, wildlife safety and attractant management during presentations that included storytelling roll play and connection with hands-on interactions with animal pelts and skulls.

Figure 2. Children engaged with wildlife during the WildSafe Ranger Program through storytelling and hands on experience.

Table 1. Schools that the WildSafe Ranger program was delivered to in 2023.

School	# of presentations	Grade	No. Participants
Hume Elementary	1	5	28
South Nelson Elementary	3	K-4	97
Early Care & Learning	1	Pre-school	18
WildFlower School	1	K-1	22
St. Joseph's School	2	K-9	134
Waldorf School	1	9	11
Rosemont Elementary	1	K-5	122
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>432</b>



Figure 3. The display booth and educational items used while the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator educated children about attractant management & wildlife safety at 6 schools.

## Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC provided 10 presentations to 288 participants (Table 2, Figure 4). Presentations focused on attractant management, wildlife safety and safe bear spray deployment. Such events allow the public to ask questions and share their concerns.

**Table 2. Presentations to community groups in 2023.**

Organization	Presentations (#)	Topic	Participants (#)
Kokanee Creek Provincial Park Visitor Center	1	Wildlife safety & attractant mitigation & bear spray workshop	23
Nelson Rod & Gun Club and Balfour Community Hall	2	Support for Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions - Grizzly Bear Safety Presentation	62
Selkirk College	3	Wildlife Safety and bear Spray Demonstration	115
Waldorf School - Teachers	1	Wildlife safety and bear spray workshop	23
City of Nelson Public Works Department	1	Wildlife safety	28
Schoolhouse of Early Care & Learning	1	Wildlife safety and bear spray workshop	3
WildSafeBC at Lion's Park	1	Attractant management, safety & bear spray workshop	34
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>288</b>



**Figure 4. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator delivering a Wildlife Safety and Awareness Presentation in Kokanee Creek Provincial Park Nature Centre**

## Display Booths

Display booths were setup at 10 community events reaching over 734 people (Table 3; Figure 5). The WCC attended Lakeside Canada Day festivities, the Kootenay Co-op Radio block party, Balfour Daze festival, and the City of Nelson’s Organics Foodcycler Launch. Grizzly Bear Co-existence Solutions also invited the WCC to setup a display booth at their annual bear safety and bear spray workshop at two locations. Display booths at community events are a great way to reach community members from diverse backgrounds, with a great opportunity to discuss how to responsibly live in wildlife country.

**Table 3. Summary of people reached through WildSafeBC public displays in 2023.**

Event	Booths (#)	People Reached (#)
<b>Kootenay Co-op Radio block party</b>	1	163
<b>Balfour Daze</b>	1	164
<b>Kokanee Creek Nature Park</b>	2	N/A
<b>Bears &amp; Brews Trivia Night</b>	1	23
<b>Kootenay Co-op store front</b>	1	11
<b>City of Nelson Organics Program Launch</b>	1	49
<b>Lakeside Canada Day Festival</b>	1	273
<b>Grizzly Bear Co-Existence bear safety &amp; bear spray workshop</b>	2	51
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>&gt;734</b>



**Figure 5. WildSafeBC Display Booth setups at different community events in Nelson in 2023.**

The WCC set up booths at the Kootenay Co-op and Kokanee Creek Nature Centre this year (Figure 5). Display booths targeting families and kids camping at Kokanee Creek Provincial Park Nature Centre helped spread information on the WildSafeBC Bare Camping guide as well as information on safety practices while in wildlife country and safe bear spray deployment.



## Door-to-Door and Garbage Tagging

Door-to-door campaigns educate the public on bears and other wildlife present in areas with active attractant management and wildlife conflict issues. The WCC spoke to people outside their homes or left educational information at residences where no direct conversations occurred. A total of 98 residents were directly spoken to and 513 door hangers were left. Targeted areas were chosen based on community reports, WildSafeBC's WARP program and at the request of the local COS. The WCC managed to visit 100 homes in one day when a grizzly bear family arrived in town.

Bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of solid waste containers set curbside the day before collection (Figure 6). Residents that receive stickers are encouraged to phone the WCC for a friendly chat to discuss the hazards of leaving garbage on the curb throughout the night. During 7 outings, 43 bins were tagged. Repeat offenders were forwarded to the City of Nelson Bylaw department. In addition to bin being put out early, the WCC has observed bin being improperly stored outside between collection times, most notably in carports. Many residents have adopted better Bear Smart practices, but outside garbage storage and early morning setting out of garbage remains an issue in some areas.



**Figure 6. Garbage bins placed out the night before collection and subsequently tagged with a warning sticker.**

## Brochure Distribution

The WCC delivered brochures to be displayed and distributed at the local Visitors Centre, popular trailheads, the Nelson campground and Kokanee Creek Park Nature Center. These locations are a popular destination for visitors looking for local information (Figure 7).



Figure 7. WildSafeBC Brochures on display in the Nelson community.

## Social Media and Press

Social media presence via Facebook published over 103 posts this season. The WCC was also active on popular community pages around the Nelson area, providing area specific information on local wildlife activity. The WildSafeBC Nelson Facebook page achieved a maximum reach of 95,256 people in 2023 and the number of followers grew by 52% from 1308 to 1983.

The WCC was active in providing education through the press and social media. The WCC continued the tradition of providing seasonal press releases for the Nelson Star. WildSafeBC also contributed comments to the Nelson Star on articles involving the grizzly bear family arrival, subsequent relocation and return, bear smart practices, black bears accessing garbage bins, and Halloween pumpkins:

- <https://www.mynelsonnow.com/54548/featured/nelsons-grizzly-family-will-not-be-relocated/>
- <https://www.nelsonstar.com/local-news/bring-in-your-halloween-pumpkins-at-night-says-wildsafebc-6518257>

WildSafeBC Nelson was also featured on several large provincial news channels in relation to the relocation of the grizzly bear family: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/grizzly-bear-sow-cubs-relocated-nelson-bc-1.6984638>

The WCC also made four radio appearances on Bounce Radio 106.9 (Figure 8) and The Bridge FM. These stories were also published online. WildSafeBC messaging was also featured regularly in the weekly RDCK Area E newsletter.



**Figure 8. WildSafeBC Nelson participating in a radio interview on Bounce Radio.**

## Wildlife in Area Signs

The WCC collaborated with the RDCK parks supervisor and the Ursa Project Society to post Bear In Area signs at the Mountain Station Rail Trail, as well as at various trail head entries during the presence of the Grizzly Bear family. These signs accompanied caution tape in an effort to remind trail users that the trails were closed to the public. In late November, a Bear In Area sign was placed at the intersection of Vernon and Cedar streets alerting residents in that neighbourhood of 2 black bears frequenting yards and porches.

## Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to adopt practices that will reduce conflict with wildlife to keep their staff and patrons safe and wildlife wild. Through these actions, businesses are setting 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. Two local businesses were assessed for eligibility and were successful candidates in joining the WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program in the 2023 season. The WCC would like to congratulate the Kootenay Co-op and the Hume Hotel for taking the pledge to help keep wildlife wild and communities safe by adhering to wildlife smart practices (Figure 9).



**Figure 9. The Hume Hotel (left) and the Kootenay Co-op signed the WildSafeBC Business Pledge Program in 2023.**

## Bare Camping 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. No new campsites were approached or participated in the program this season and this should be prioritized by future WCC's due to the high volume of recreational camping and tourism in the area.

## Indigenous Engagement

The BCCF provided provincial WCC's with online training with Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc. on how to effectively work with Indigenous People's. The Nelson WCC deemed this education as vital in recognizing, and respecting Indigenous culture, as well as personal and professional steps towards reconciliation.

The WCC was joined by WCC's from Arrow-Lakes, Castlegar, Rossland and Boundary programs in a meet and greet with a representative from the Autonomous Sinixt. Here, WCC's learned valuable information about Indigenous engagement, effective stewardship of wildlife and land, and traditional Sinixt culture and language.

An introduction with the Fish & Wildlife department of the Colville Confederated Tribes was warmly greeted at an event with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions in Nelson. The WCC looks forward to future discussions about the Sinixt People's relationship with local wildlife.

## Special Initiatives & Collaborations

### City of Nelson info-sessions

The WCC was invited by the City of Nelson to collaborate on a informative "[behind-the-scenes](#)"

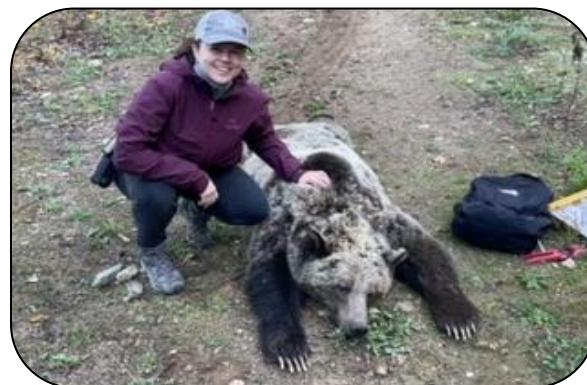
info-session filmed for general information on the WildSafeBC program and educate residents on their wildlife safe responsibilities (Figure 10). Additionally, the WCC appeared in the City of Nelson's informative video on the new Organics Waste Program.



**Figure 10.** Image from the City of Nelson's "Behind the Scenes with WildSafeBC" informative video.

## Grizzly Bear family Relocation

In September, a local family of 3 Grizzly Bears travelled from their usual habitat near Cottonwood Park/Apex Mountain, into the Mountain Station and Uphill area. The abundance of fruit trees harbouring a generous harvest of apples was deemed to be the main source of attracting them during their hyperphagia stage. The BC Conservation Officers Service (COS) and carnivore biologist with the Ministry of Forests made plans to trap and relocate the family to avoid this keystone species to come into conflict, or become food conditioned to human generated garbage (Figure 11).



**Figure 11.** WildSafeBC Community Coordinator Lisa Thomson next to the sedated Grizzly Bear Sow during the relocation efforts.

It was the utmost pleasure of the WCC to be included in such a grand, multi-day operation that

included collaborating with Mountain Station residents, the RDCK Parks department, City of Nelson Bylaw officers, the RCMP, and other COS from neighboring regions. The operation went smoothly and safely, with the Sow being radio collared and her two male ~2.5 year old cubs being ear tagged and relocated within their home range, as determined by the biologist and COS. However, the family returned days later to continue feasting on fruit trees. The family remained in Nelson for the majority of the fall season, then moved to their winter den site without incident.

## Bear-resistant garbage bins

The Kootenay Lake Tourism board securing funding to install Haul-All bear proof garbage bins throughout the region. Along with the COS and other bear smart parties, the WCC contributed to a list of suggested sites for these bins to be installed. This project set for 2024 will greatly aid in minimizing bears and other wildlife accessing human generated garbage in areas where people recreate in the Kootenay Lake region. The City of Nelson installed 34 bear-resistant Haul-All bins to date and has committed to installing more bear-resistant bins in the future, pending manufacture supply and city planning.

## Foodcycler™ Organics Program

WildSafeBC was in partnership with the [City of Nelson's Foodcycler Organics Program](#) initiative to provide food recycling devices and information to residents in a targeted neighbourhood (Figure 12). This program aims to reduce wildlife attractants caused by the amount of solid waste collected. This program also caters to resource sustainability, for a cleaner future. The City of Nelson's Climate and Energy Department will continue their research on the program, and hope that in the near future, all single-family residential dwellings will have a Foodcycler™ to reduce the amount of organic food waste generated in homes. At the end of the 2023 WildSafeBC season, 1106 Foodcyclers™ had been distributed to residents.



Figure 12. City of Nelson Food Organics Program.

## Fruit tree Removal

This season, the WCC was able to identify fruit and nut trees on public property with the aid of public reporting (Figure 13). The City of Nelson Public Works department was quick to confirm property lines and worked swiftly to remove five food-bearing trees from the community. In 2024, such trees will be replaced with native, non-food bearing trees. This initiative was paramount in reducing the volume of wasted fruit and minimizing the number of food conditioned bears. The WCC hopes this initiative will continue in 2024 and expand to Area E of the RDCK. The WCC recommends a cost-share program for residents to remove unwanted fruit trees in collaboration with a local arborist be implemented in the region.



**Figure 13. Crab Apple tree on City of Nelson property.**

## BC Goes Wild Special Event

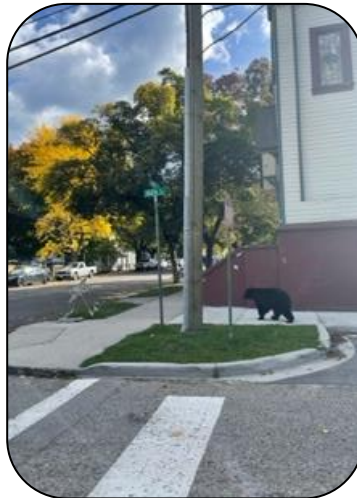
BC Goes Wild is a celebration of British Columbia's great diversity of wildlife. September is historically a month where human-bear conflicts are at their highest. BC Goes Wild coincides with this month to bring awareness to these issues while also promoting ways we can live, work, play, and grow in wildlife country.

The WCC held a Bears & Brews trivia night at the Uptown Sports bar. Local organizations, including Oso Negro Coffee, Paula Wallis Photography, and the Ursa Project Society generously donated prizes. The event was well received and attended by newcomers to Nelson, who gained pertinent information on bear smart practices.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Improperly managed garbage and fruit/nut trees continue to be the main sources of human-wildlife conflict in the Nelson area. These unnatural food sources draw wildlife into the community and bears were observed frequenting downtown and residential areas (Figure 14). To address these challenges, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2024:

- Continue to increase the number of Haul-All Bear proof garbage bins in public spaces and decommission concrete open bins throughout the community.
- Continue to distribute Foodcyclers™ devices to residents in high conflict neighbourhoods.
- Continue education on attractant management and wildlife safety through door-to-door canvassing, presentations for general public and in schools, display booths, social media, and the press.
- Engage businesses through the WildSafeBC Business Pledge.
- Support local campgrounds through the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.
- Continue to foster and build relationships with local groups that share common goals.
- Explore solutions to continue to offer bear-resistant containers in the region as the program has been discontinued by the City of Nelson.
- Continue to remove food-bearing trees on public land and explore cost-share solutions to provide residents with unwanted fruit tree removal.
- Work to encourage the amendment of municipal bylaws to include controls on planting food producing trees and the proper care and management of these trees in the area.



**Figure 14. A black bear frequenting downtown Nelson, 2023.**

## Acknowledgments

The WCC would like to acknowledge the generous and continued support it receives from its sponsors the Province of British Columbia, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the City of Nelson, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, and the Columbia Basin Trust.

The WCC also values the unwavering support provided by Conservation Officers Nathan Smienk and Jason Hawkes. A special thanks to Anne and Rick Pidgeon operators of Kokanee Creek Provincial Park campground, as well as the crew at the Kokanee Creek Visitor Centre for their commitment and hard work in keeping wildlife wild and campers educated and safe. Thank you to local bear biologist Grant MacHutchon for always being available to answer questions and provide literature and insight into bear behaviours. With much gratitude to the provincial Wildlife



Specialist of the Ministry of Forest for including me in the Grizzly Bear relocation team. It was an incredibly unforgettable experience.

This WCC appreciated the swift response by the City of Nelson Public Works Department and ByLaw Officers in addressing notable concerns observed during canvassing by the WCC.

Thank you also to Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions for collaborations on electric fencing in Area E and educational workshops. The WCC is looking forward to future collaborations with Ms. Sanders.

The WCC appreciated ground support from the Ursa Project Society, during the presence of the Grizzly Bear family.

Finally, thank you to the Nelson Star and Nelson Daily Newspapers, The Bridge FM, Bounce Radio and RDCK Area E Director Graham for promoting our WildSafeBC messaging to the community at large and helping us deliver our safety information to a wider audience.