

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2020

## Columbia Valley

Prepared by: Corinna Strauss, WildSafeBC Columbia Valley  
Coordinator



## Executive Summary

This report describes the WildSafeBC Columbia Valley Program's activities between May 11 and November 30, 2020. The WildSafeBC Columbia Valley Program is located on the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa First Nation and the Shuswap Indian Band, within the District of Invermere, Fairmont Hot Springs, Regional District of East Kootenay Area F & G, and the Village of Radium Hot Springs (Figure 1). Throughout these areas, information was provided to residents and visitors to the area about living safely with wildlife and recreating in bear country.

In the District of Invermere, deer and black bear continued to be the most reported conflict species. As of October 31, 2020, there were 29 black bear reports this year which is on track to be below average compared to the three-year average. Attractants are an ongoing issue in Invermere. Reports were made of black bears accessing unsecured residential garbage both before and after the new automated garbage system was rolled out. The new carts are wildlife-resistant but not certified as bear-resistant. There were four incidents reported where the new garbage bins were targeted as a food source by black bears and damaged. Unmanaged fruit trees continue to provide a human source of food for bears. From January 1 to October 31, there were 58 reports of deer in conflict; some resulted in injuries to dogs and one person. This is on track to be less than the 80 reports received in 2018 but close to the three-year average of 61.

Within the Village of Radium Hot Springs and Area G, black bear continues to be the highest reported conflict species. In 2020, there have been 47 black bear reports, which is a drop from 2019, where 101 black bears were reported. In 2020, the 47 black bear reports were below the three-year average which is, 87 reports (Figure 6, 7 & 8). Ongoing attractants issues are waste left outside dumpsters and unmanaged fruit trees.

Within Fairmont Hot Springs and Area F, black bears continue to be the highest reported conflict species. In 2020, there have been 30 black bear reports, which is significantly less compared to 2019 when there were 68 black bear reports (Figure 9, 10 & 11). The three-year average is 36 black bears; this year is on par with the trend of black bears reported. Three bears were destroyed this season in Fairmont and Area F from accessing attractants. Unmanaged attractants are an ongoing issue in Fairmont. Black bears accessed unsecured commercial garbage when the dumpster latches were faulty or not closed properly. Unmanaged fruit trees, bird feeders, and barbeques continue to be an ongoing issue in Fairmont.

The WSBC Community Coordinator (WCC), provided outreach materials, wildlife updates, attractant management advice to limit conflict with wildlife in the Columbia Valley. This was completed following COVID-19 safety precautions to ensure sanitization and physical distancing guidelines. The outreach activities included:

## Invermere

- 2 WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) Presentations and 32 youth reached
- 2 Bear and Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray Clinics delivered and one on ZOOM with a total of 16 people who attended
- 63 carts that received bin tagging stickers
- 59 people reached through door-to-door canvassing and placement of door hangers
- 14 display booths and 634 people reached
- Bear Day Event (Ursus & Us) hosted in conjunction with WildSight Invermere with bear spray presentations and an information booth; 142 people reached

## Fairmont Hot Springs and Area F

- 2 Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray Clinics and one ZOOM presentation; 24 people attended
- 42 people reached through door-to-door canvassing and placement on door hangers.
- 3 display booths and 105 people reached

## Radium Hot Springs and Area G

- 3 WildSafe Ranger Presentations and 76 youth reached
- 2 Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray Clinics; 18 people attended
- 46 people and businesses reached through door-to-door canvassing and placement of door hangers
- 2 display booths and 17 people reached
- BC Goes Wild wilderness hike to Diana Lake; 11 people participated

Additionally, the WCC submitted articles to the Columbia Valley Pioneer and the WildSafeBC Columbia Valley Facebook page grew in 2020 from 616 to 806 followers; an increase of 28%.

Challenges faced in the Columbia Valley continue to stem from improperly managed attractants such as fruit trees, bird feeders, and residential and commercial garbage that is not stored correctly and/or the bear-resistant bins that are not used properly. Moving forward to 2021, reaching second homeowners and visitors to the valley is a top priority, along with education to both commercial businesses and residents. Groundswell Apple Rescue and Fairmont Community Association are local fruit gleaning organizations and community groups that are essential collaborators. Another goal is to update the *Bear Hazard Assessment and Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan* created in 2012 and continue to work towards achieving Bear Smart Community status for Invermere. These initiatives and collaborations will help "keep wildlife wild and our community safe."

WildSafeBC wants to acknowledge the continued support from its sponsors: Columbia Basin Trust, District of Invermere, Village of Radium Hot Springs, Regional District of East Kootenay, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

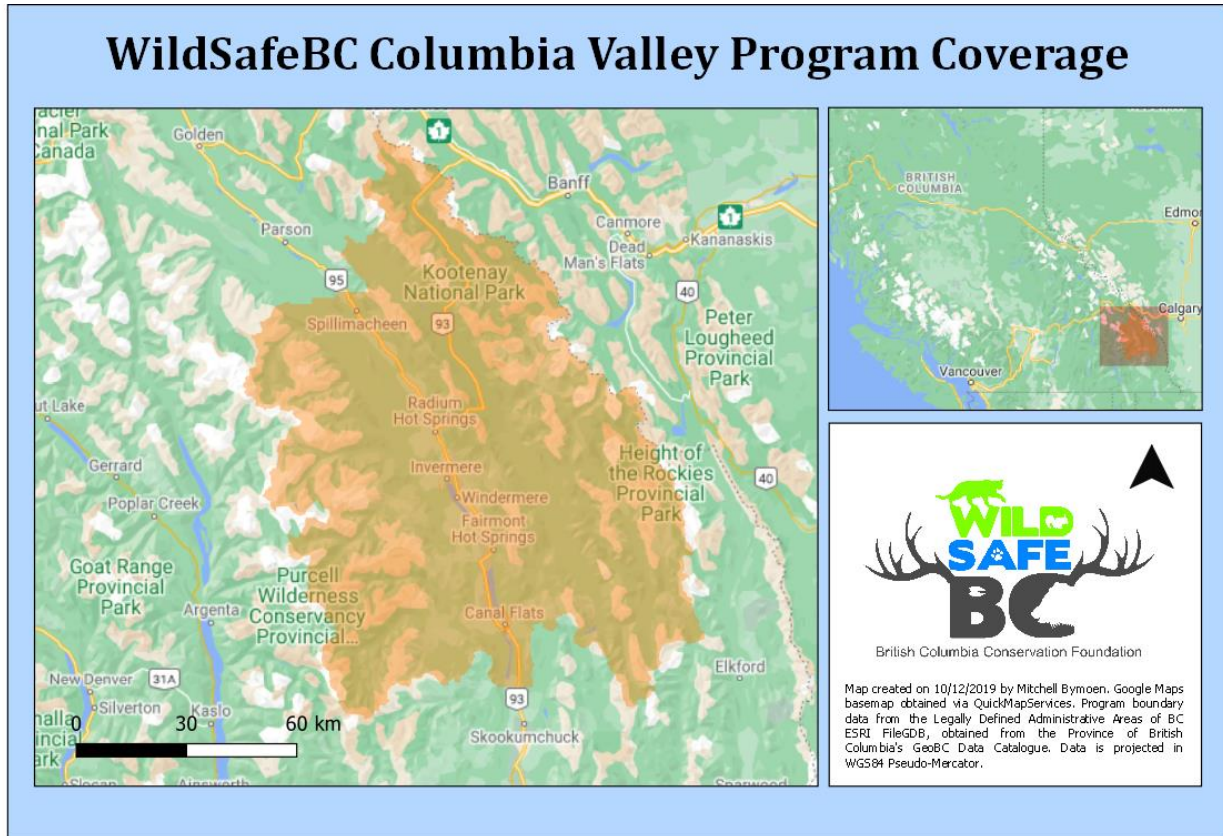


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Columbia program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: A Black Bear running through the town of Invermere on 10<sup>th</sup> street. Photo credit Cam McLellan.

## Highlights from the 2020 Season

### Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) or online form (<https://forms.gov.bc.ca/environment/rapp/>) are available to the public through WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) on the WildSafeBC website. This data is updated daily, and this report for the Columbia Valley includes data from January 1, 2016, to October 31, 2020.

#### Invermere

The most reported conflict species in Invermere are deer and black bears, similar to the previous two years. There has been a decrease in black bear reports from 2019 to 2020 from 60 bears in 2019 to 29 black bears reported in 2020, below the five-year average of 54 (Figure 2). The number of deer reported in 2019 was 69, and in 2020 the reports dropped slightly to 58 deer, which is on par with the five-year average at 62 (Figure 3). Most deer reports involve sightings of injured animals.

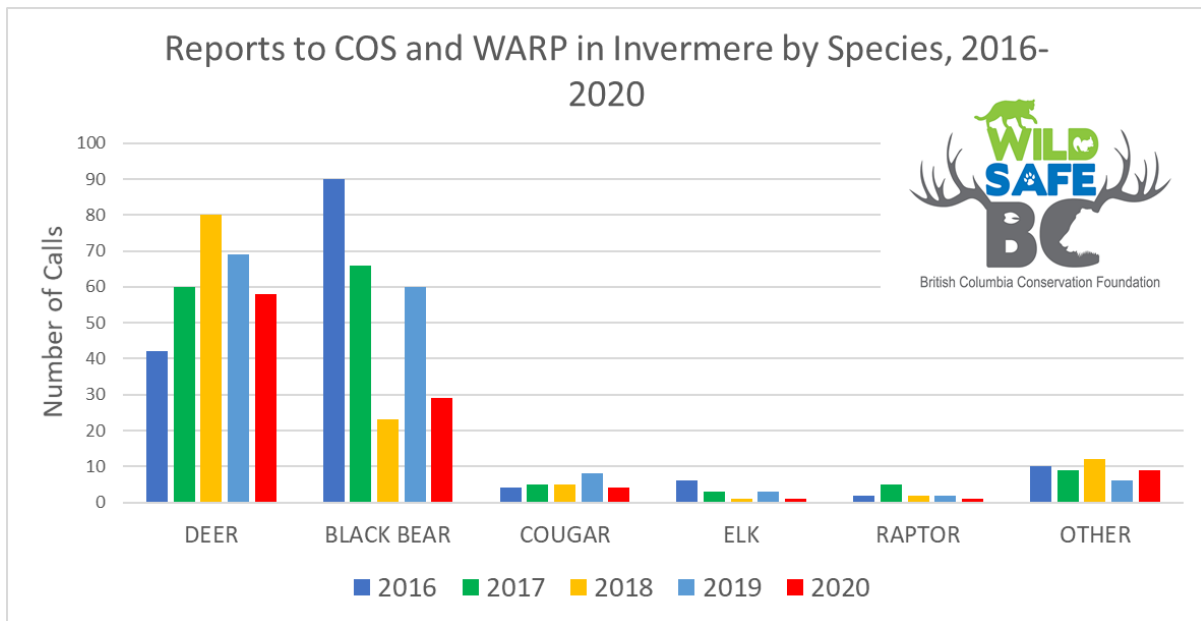


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP by species of wildlife from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

The urban deer population in Invermere continues to thrive and human-wildlife conflicts continue. Much of the mule deer population in Invermere is food-conditioned and human-habituated as a result of both intentional and unintentional feeding. Deer also find safety from predators among the numerous green spaces and gardens. The deer have exhibited aggressive behavior year-round. However, conflicts spike in the spring when does are protecting their newborn fawns and in the fall during breeding season. Most incidents with aggressive deer stem from the presence of domestic dogs. Canines are natural predators of deer in the wild. The deer have shown aggression towards people without domestic dogs present. The WCC provides

“Aggressive Deer” signage when requested and advises the public to give the deer as wide a berth as possible and to keep dogs on a leash.

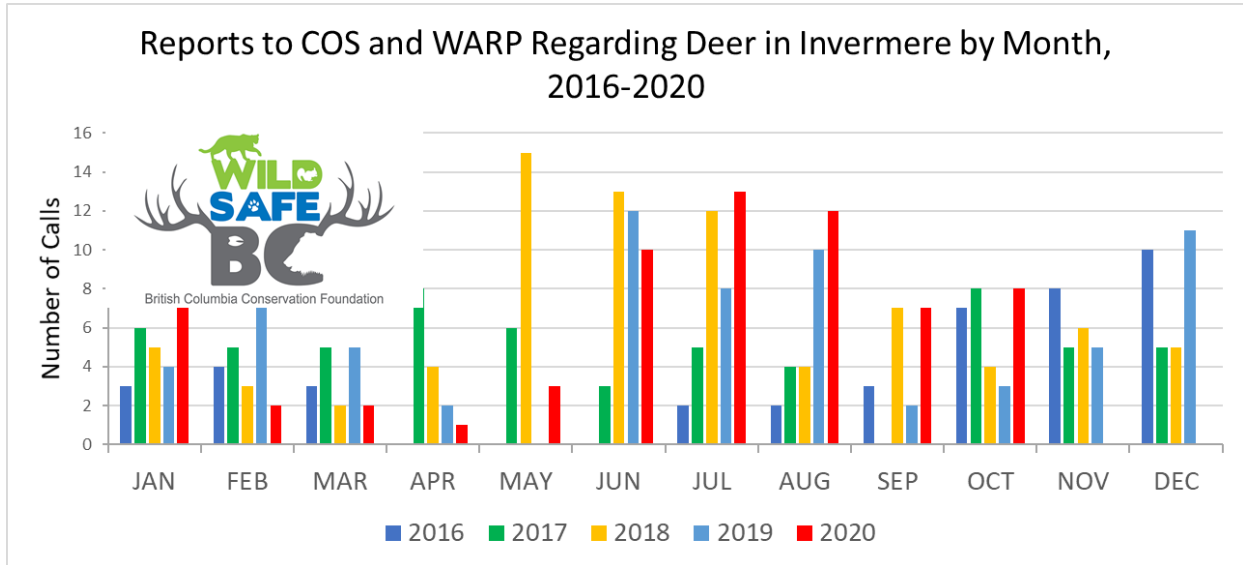


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding deer in Invermere from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

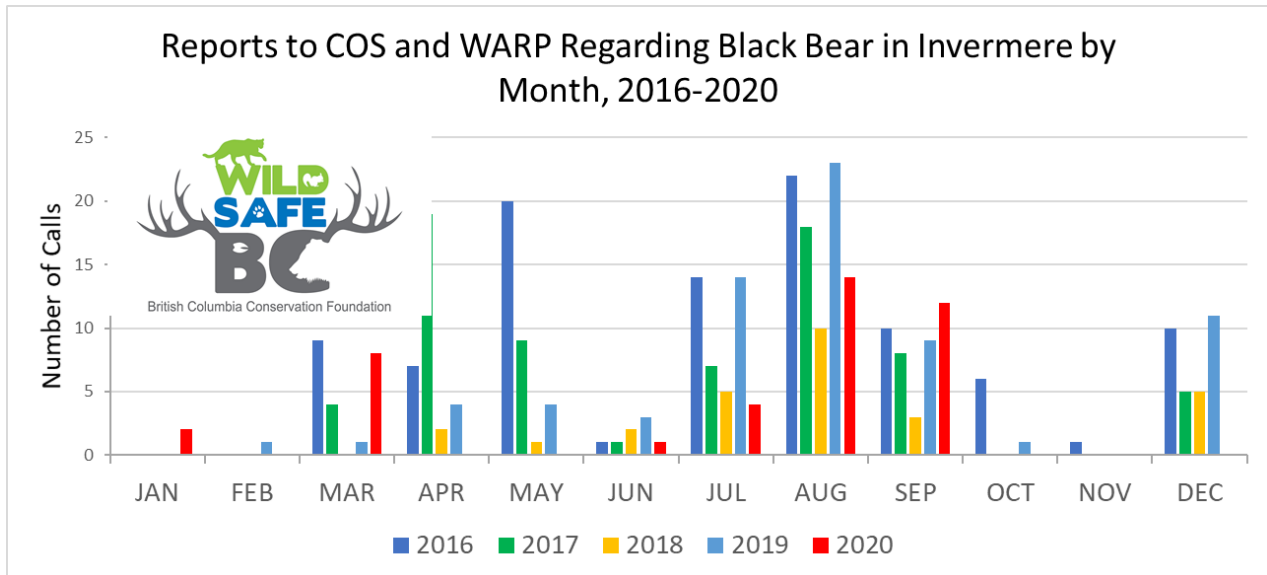
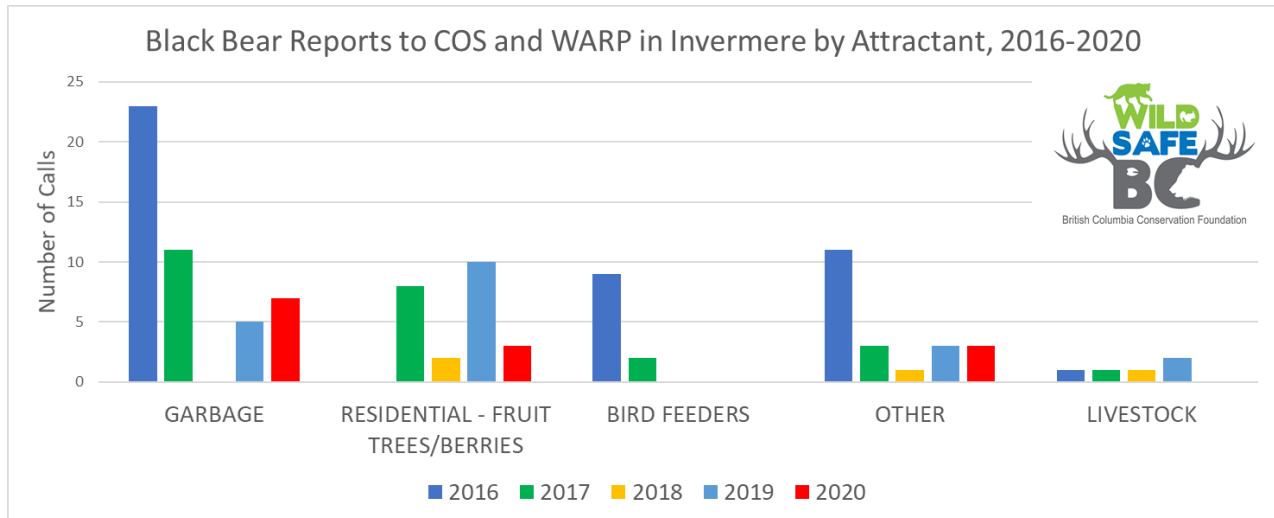


Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears per month from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

Over the past five years in Invermere, garbage accounted for the most reported attractant for black bears (Figure 5). These attractants lead to food-conditioning, a learned behaviour where bears associate humans and their activities with food sources. When bears spend time in communities and begin to lose their natural wariness of humans, they can become human-habituated. This leads to less space between us and bears, which can be unsafe for both parties. The prevalence of anthropogenic attractants left accessible to wildlife indicates the need



for continued public education including outreach and ongoing collaboration with fruit gleaning efforts.



**Figure 5. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears and attractants in Invermere from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.**

## Radium Hot Springs

In Radium Hot Springs, the species with the highest number of reports continue to be black bears and deer (Figure 6). The reports of black bears in the 2020 season are lower with 46 black reports compared to 2019 with 100 and lower than the five-year average of 66. Black bear reports tend to be higher in spring and fall (Figure 7).

In 2019, 44 deer were reported, and in 2020, 32 deer were reported, which is slightly below the five-year average at 42 (Figure 6). A notable mention species is the grizzly bear. In the spring of 2020, grizzly bear activity was noticeably higher as per discussions between the COS and the WCC. In 2019 and 2020, 11 grizzly bear reports were made above the five-year average at 6 (Figure 6). However, the reports and sightings have lower numbers compared to other species. In areas of higher human populations or land use in BC, grizzly bears have become extirpated from those areas, or the grizzly bear population remains vulnerable. The grizzly bear reports in 2020 were sightings except for one incident. Two juvenile grizzly bears accessed a beehive in the Junipers Heights area. Public education is required to reduce human-grizzly bear conflict. This includes advice on attractant management using a variety of solutions and tools as well as signage on recreational trails. At times, area closures may be required for public safety and to prevent conflict.

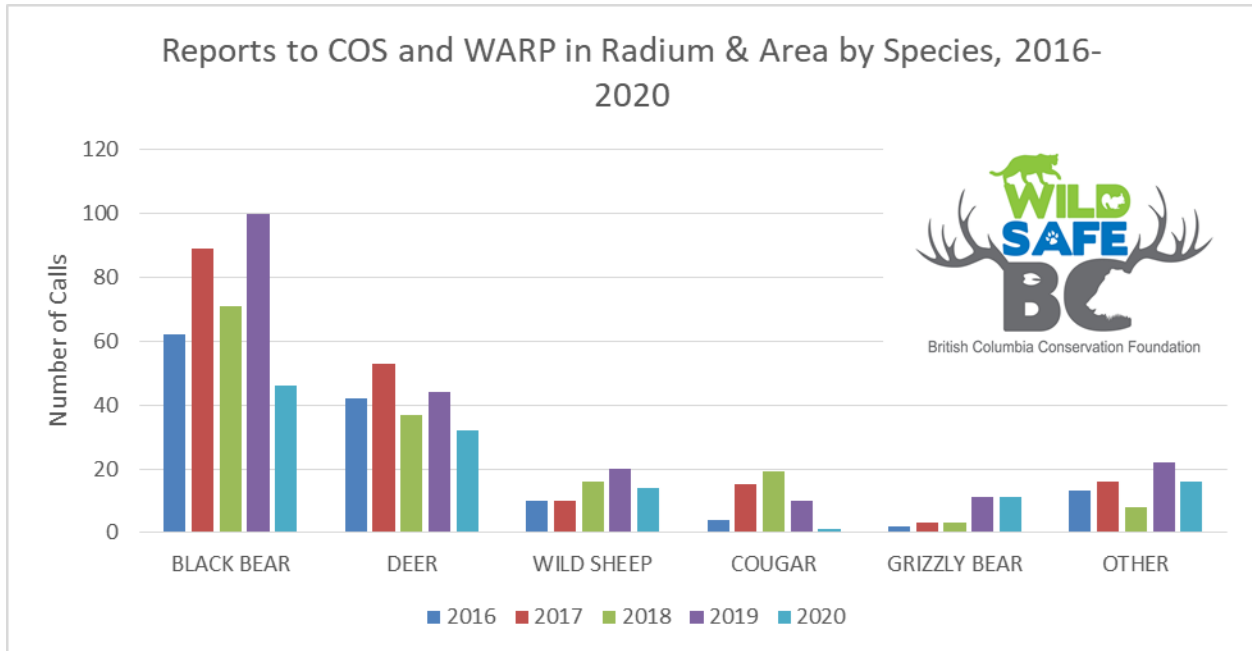


Figure 6. Reports to the COS and WARP by species of wildlife in Radium and area from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

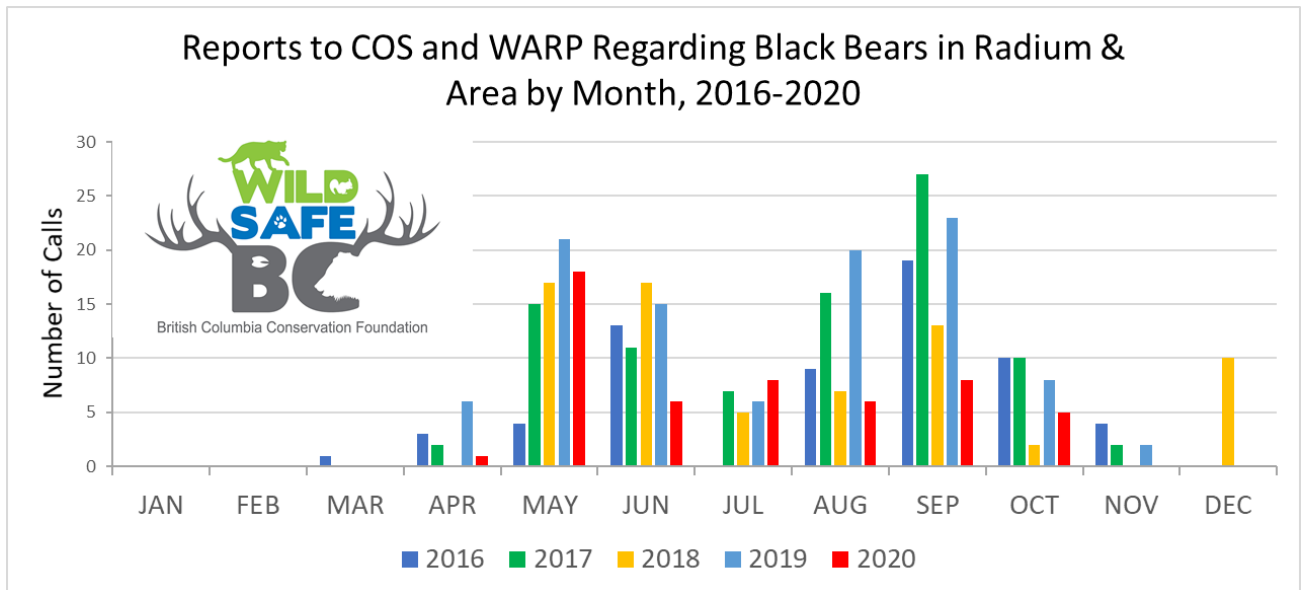


Figure 7. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears by month in the Radium area from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

Garbage remains the main attractant for black bears in the Radium area. The number of bears accessing garbage has significantly decreased from 2016 to 2020 (Figure 8). Continued collaboration with WildSafeBC, the Village of Radium Hot Springs, RDEK, and local businesses has been successful in reducing conflicts and should continue in order to keep numbers low.

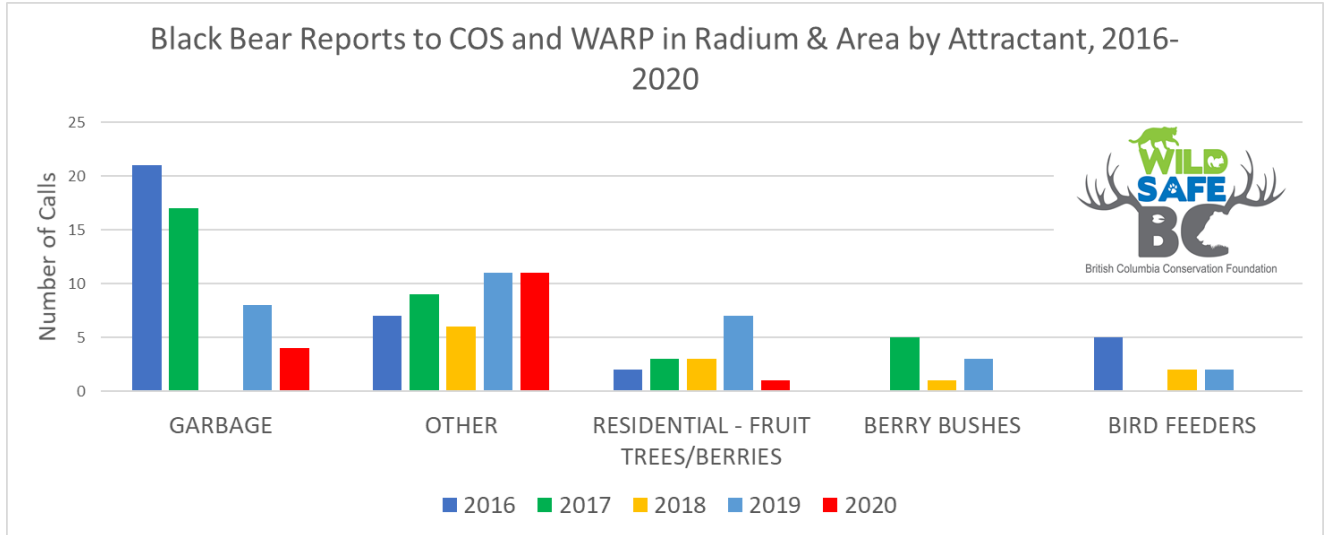


Figure 8. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears and attractants in the Radium area from January 1, to October 31, 2020.

**Fairmont**

In Fairmont Hot Springs, the species with the highest number of reports continues to be black bear. The reports of black bears in the 2020 season were lower with 30 black reports compared to 2019 with 68 and on par with the five-year average of 30 (Figure 9). In Fairmont Hot Springs deer are less of a human-wildlife conflict issue in comparison to the nearby communities.

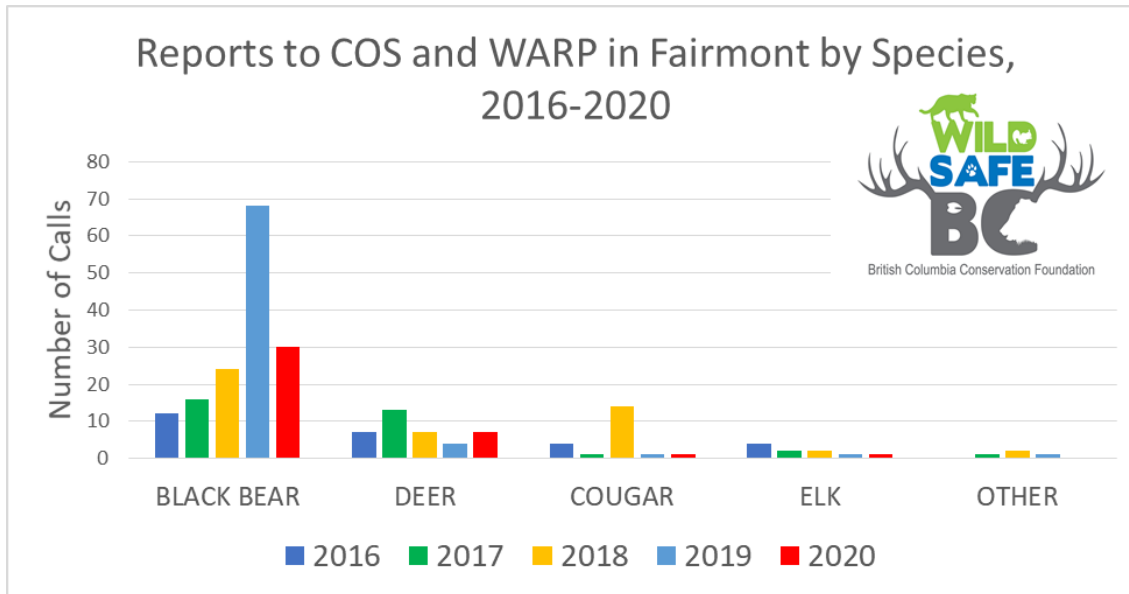
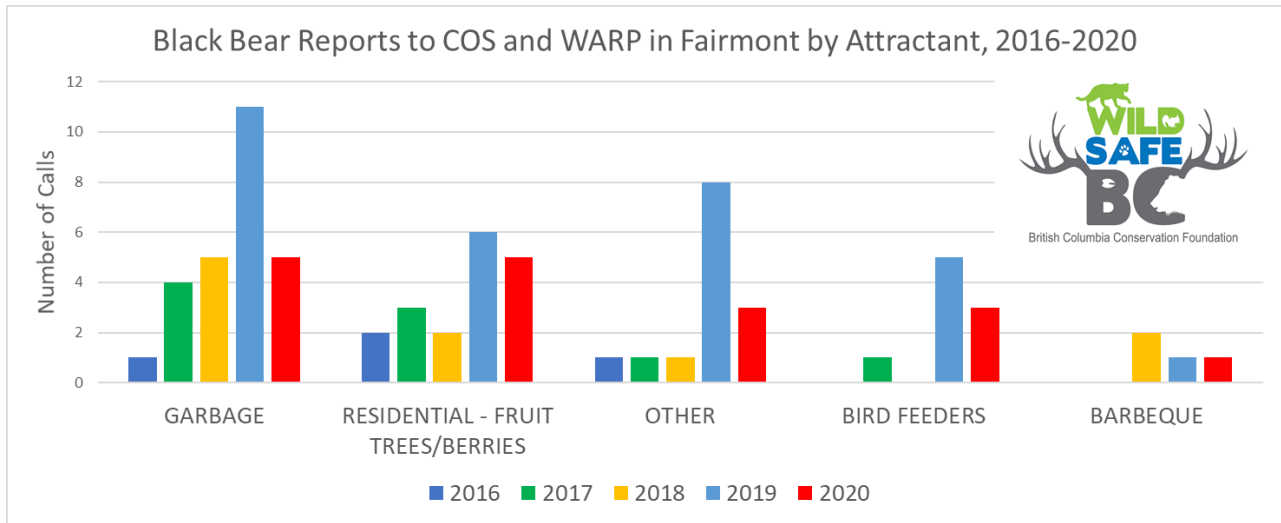


Figure 9. Reports to the COS and WARP by species of wildlife in Fairmont and area from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

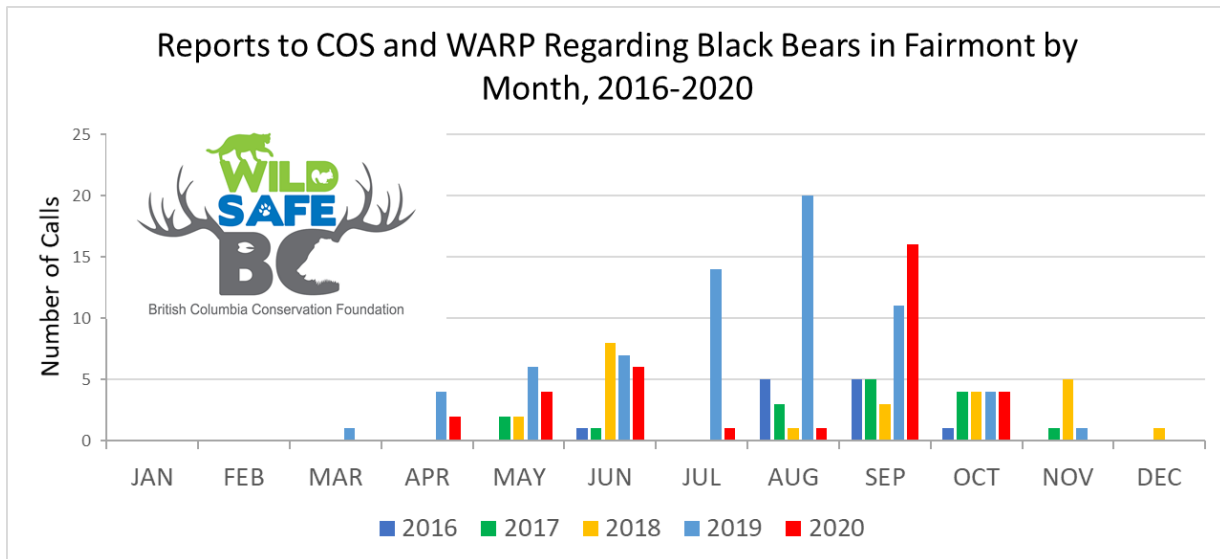
Garbage remains the most reported attractant for black bears in the Fairmont area followed by fruit trees and berries (Figure 10). The number of bears accessing garbage decreased from 2019 to 2020 while. Fairmont Hot Springs and surrounding area is a hot spot for black bears as

it is the ideal location and habitat. Fairmont provides an ideal vacation spot for many visitors. Fairmont Hot Springs Resort and Fairmont Mountainside Vacation Villas have a high amount of black bear activity. In 2020, both resorts put forward a strong effort to reduce available attractants. In addition, they provided visitors with education on attractant management and how to react appropriately when sighting a bear or other types of wildlife. This has played a role in decreasing the number of calls from 2019 to 2020 (Figure 9 & 11).

The Fairmont Community Association provides a volunteer fruit gleaning program. This contributes to the removal of ripe fruit from trees. Fruit trees and berry bushes in Fairmont provide an ongoing source of human-bear conflict (Figure 10).



**Figure 10. Reports made to the COS and WARP in Fairmont and Area by attractants from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.**



**Figure 11. Reports made to the COS and WARP in Fairmont and Area regarding black bears from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016-October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020.**

## WildSafeBC COVID-19 Mitigation

All of the activities performed this season followed safety guidelines provided by the Province, WorkSafeBC, and/or the BC Conservation Foundation's Safety Coordinator. The WCCs were required to provide safety plans if they were organizing events where people would congregate. Wherever possible, in-person activities were replaced with video conferencing. WildSafeBC adapted and modified requirements as the Province moved from Phase 1 to Phase 3. The WCCs worked closely with their local communities to ensure that all local requirements and restrictions were respected.

## WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to wildlife in British Columbia, how to live safely with wildlife, and manage attractants. A total of three schools participated in the WRP and 141 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits (Table 1, Figure 12).

Table 1. WildSafe Ranger Presentations to schools within the Columbia Valley in the 2020 season.

School	Grade	Students
Eileen Madison	3	20
Martin Morigeau Elementary School - Windermere	2, 3 &4	44
Edgewater Elementary School	K, 1, 2, 3,	76



Figure 12. WildSafe Rangers presentations at Edgewater and Windermere Elementary School.

## Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC provided 10 presentations and events through webinars and outdoor presentations with a total of 218 participants (Table 2, Figure 13).

Table 2. Presentations to community groups.

Group	Location	Participants	Topic
Old Coach Trailhead	Area G	11	Bear Spray Clinic and Wildlife Safety and Awareness
Women Who Wander	Invermere	10	Wildlife Safety and Awareness via ZOOM
Pothole Park	Invermere	7	Bear Spray Clinic and Wildlife Safety and Awareness
Annual Bear Day Event	Invermere	142	Bear Spray demonstrations and informational booth
Fairmont Community Association	Fairmont	5	Wildlife Safety and Awareness via ZOOM
Fairmont Hot Springs Resort	Fairmont	11	Bear Spray Clinic and Wildlife Safety and Awareness. (Staff Training)
My 40 Back	Brisco Area G	5	Bear Spray Clinic and Wildlife Safety and Awareness
BC Goes Wild Event	Area G Diana Lake	11	Wilderness Hike, Bear spray demonstration.
Mountainside Fairmont Vacation Villas	Fairmont	6	Bear Spray Clinic and Wildlife Safety and Awareness. (Staff Training)
Women Who Wander	RDEK	10	Bear Spray Clinic, Wildlife Safety, and Awareness and Wilderness Hike



Figure 13. WCC Corinna Strauss presents a wildlife safety and bear spray presentation at the Regional District of East Kootenay building parking lot in Windermere.



## Display Booths

The WCC provided informative display booths in outdoor spaces and structures with adequate ventilation where proper COVID-19 physical distancing and proper sanitization procedures were followed (Table 3, Figure 14). The WCC organized a booth with various market vendors and other high traffic areas where wildlife safety information was needed.

Table 3. Summary of display booths in 2020.

Location	Number of Booths attended	People reached
Agri-Park Market	14	490
Panorama Mountain Resort	2	86
Fairmont Farmer's Market	2	100
Canal Flats Farmer's Market	1	19
Radium Visitor's Center	2	17



Figure 14. Information booth set up at Fairmont Farmer's Market in July 2020.

## BC Goes Wild

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 WCC hosted a wilderness hike to Diana Lake on September 12 and 11 people participated (Figures 15 & 16). The wilderness hike commenced in this area due to its frequent bear activity by black and grizzly bears. The hike provided many firsthand educational sights and experiences for the participants, such as bear scat, bear digging, and natural bear foods.



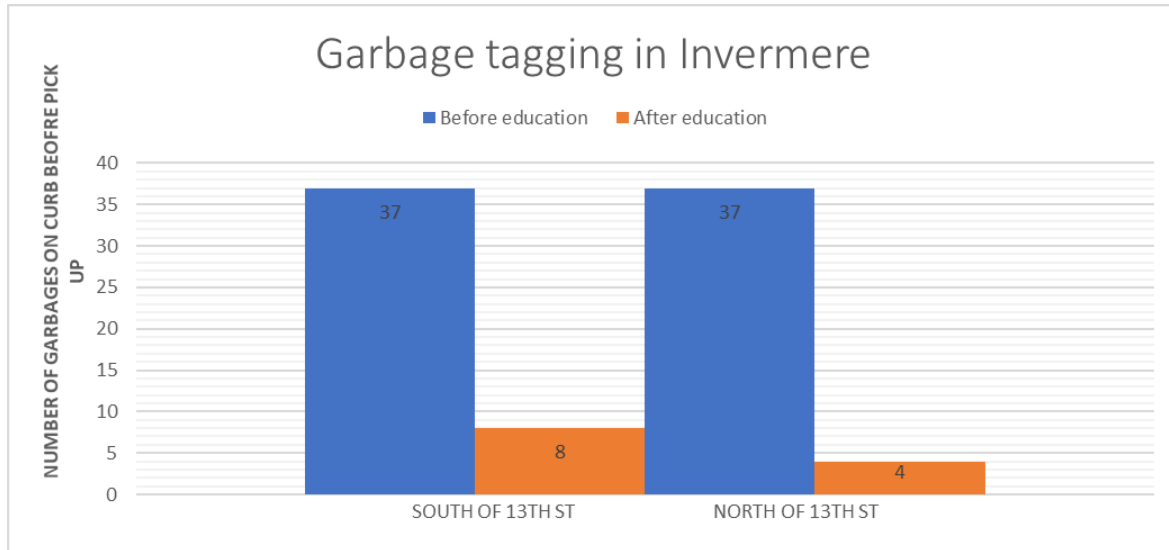
Figure 15. Bear scat on the BC Goes Wild wilderness hike.



Figure 16. BC Goes Wild wilderness hike to Diana Lake.

## Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. During 12 outings in Invermere, 65 bins were tagged, and there were 10 repeat offenders (Figure 17). The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviors is demonstrated by the number of the residences whose bins were tagged during the initial survey and then were not found on the curb again during the second survey. Garbage tagging is not an activity carried out in Radium or the RDEK because there is no curbside garbage collection within this program coverage area.



**Figure 17. Garbage tagging in Invermere before and after education in 2020.**

Door-to-door education was modified this year to consist of leaving door hangers. The WCC did not knock on the door as has been done in the past. Throughout the spring and summer months, many residents were outdoors and chose to receive information by discussing important topics with the WCC safely. Attractant management education was needed at Canterbury Way since the arrival of new residents to the area who were unaware of garbage protocol. Residents with existing fruit trees were also canvassed as a reminder to manage fruit trees or contact Groundswell Apple Rescue for assistance. A total of 52 residences were reached.

In Fairmont and Area F, 115 residences, second homeowners, and vacation retreats were canvassed. Dutch Creek area and Dutch Creek resort were canvassed due to black bear activity, and attractant management issues related to bird feeders took place in the spring with 45 residents being contacted. In Fairmont, residents, staff accommodations, and local businesses were canvassed to educate people about managing attractants with 35 locations being reached. In late summer and early fall, 25 residences were prioritized for fruit tree and berry bush management education.

In Radium Hot Springs, 15 local businesses were canvassed to introduce them to the WCC and offer support. As well, 22 residences and local businesses were prioritized for fruit tree management education.

## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Columbia Valley Facebook page grew in 2020 from 630 to 806 followers, an increase of 28%. A variety of social media posts were created during the 2020 season. The content included Bear in Area alerts and warnings when bears were circulating popular trails. Also, information was provided to the District of Invermere residents during the new automated garbage system rollout and the new garbage containers. The local media interviewed the WCC on the proper use of the wildlife-resistant, but not bear-resistant garbage containers. The containers will be helpful in preventing small wildlife from accessing attractants but they should



still be stored indoors until the morning of collection to avoid bear conflicts. Other posts included information on bats, badgers, painted turtles, wolves, and cougars. The WCC submitted a news article to the Columbia Valley Pioneer to introduce the new coordinator and what the WildSafeBC program could provide to the community. A news article was submitted to the Columbia Valley Pioneer at the end of the season to notify the community the WildSafeBC program was entering hibernation for the winter. The COS submitted three consecutive articles throughout the season with a mention of the local WildSafeBC program and the WCC contact information.

## Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife signage is frequently utilized throughout the three Columbia Valley communities. The WCC is requested to put up Bear in Area signs and Aggressive Dear signs (Figure 18). The signage is asked for by the COS, District of Invermere, Village of Radium Hot Springs bylaw, and residents. The signage is removed from an area when the animals are no longer present or exhibiting aggressive behavior.



Figure 18. Bear in Area sign at Juniper Heights due to a boar grizzly in the area.

## Special Initiatives

The dumping of garbage next to dumpsters was identified mid-season as an ongoing issue that needed addressing. This issue is of special concern in Radium with the high number of short-term rentals, tourists and visitors that pass through the area. Many of these visitors may not be aware of the impact on wildlife such as bears or that there is a transfer station only 8 minutes from town. As a result, program funds were used to develop and purchase 20 decals for dumpsters in Radium (Figure 19).



Bring surplus waste to the Transfer Station  
6001 Edgewater South Approach Rd, Edgewater

Figure 19. Education decals for dumpsters in Radium providing information on the transfer station location.

## Collaborations

The WildSafeBC program has an ongoing vital collaboration with the Conservation Officer Service. The COS provides updates on the whereabouts and the status of dangerous wildlife in the communities. The COS has also collaborated with WildSafeBC on public outreach events (Figure 20).

Other essential collaborators to the program are the Groundswell Apple Rescue Program and Fairmont Community Association. Both programs work actively in the communities and gather volunteers to glean fruit.

A Columbia Valley Human-Wildlife Conflict Reduction Working Group meeting took place on November 10. This is a collaborative meeting in which the COS, WildSafeBC, and other representatives of the communities and areas within the Columbia Valley meet and discuss the new and ongoing human-wildlife conflict concerns and issues. The meeting provides a summary of human-wildlife conflicts throughout the season over the whole area and develops mitigation solutions and plans.



**Figure 20. Annual Bear Day Event at Pothole Park held in collaboration with Wildsight Invermere, the COS, and Groundswell Apple Rescue.**

## Challenges and Opportunities

Though COVID-19 mitigation measures have impacted the WildSafeBC program, WildSafeBC was able to successfully modify their traditional outreach activities and take advantage of new technologies to continue to deliver their program safely and effectively.

Fruit trees and unsecured garbage continue to be a source of attractants in the community that draw wildlife into residential areas. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community and those areas would benefit from increased education and better ways to contact absentee second homeowners when the fruit ripens. To continue to address the attractant management issues, continued education focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, and door-to-door campaigns are needed.

The WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program is a new initiative in 2020. The program provides clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campground for both people and wildlife. East Kootenay Parks has expressed strong support and is interested in piloting the Bare Campsite Program to lessen and prevent bear-human conflict. This will be another area of focus in 2021.

The WildSafeBC Business Pledge has been developed to encourage businesses to become good ambassadors in their community on how to co-exist with wildlife safely. More emphasis on this new platform should be a focus for the 2021 season. 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.

In addition, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2021 in each community:

## Invermere

- Wildlife-resistant garbage containers have been purchased and distributed and education is needed to remind residents that these new bins are not bear-resistant.
- The current wildlife bylaw should be updated to state that the new garbage bins are not bear proof and no garbage can be stored outside before the morning of pick -up.
- Use the District of Invermere newsletter to provide information about the proper storage of garbage and waste.
- Update the Invermere Bear Conflict Management Plan; this document was created in 2012 and needs updating. The plan can help assess where any improvements need to be made in mitigating human-wildlife and reducing access to attractants.
- Ongoing door-to-door canvassing to reach second homeowners who have unmanaged fruit trees.

## Radium

- Provide public education about living with wild turkeys. Remind residents not to feed turkeys or any other wildlife.
- Collaboration with the Village of Radium Hot Springs, BCCF's Wildlife Collision Prevention Program, and other stakeholders, to assist in decreasing vehicle collisions with Bighorn Sheep through education and other solutions.
- Provide a proactive approach with education on attractant management and the increase of grizzly bears in the valley bottom.
- Pending the COVID-19 situation, a focus will be made on:
  - Attending and providing an information booth at Market's on Main.
  - Providing WildSafe Ranger programs in the summer for youth.
  - Hosting events at the Radium Hot Springs library and taking part in the Headbanger festival.

## Fairmont

- Connect with second homeowners through flyers distributed by the Community Association.
- Continue collaborative efforts with the Fairmont Hot Springs Resort (FHSR) and Mountainside Vacation Villas with the ongoing bear attractant management issues, effective education to the guests, and staff training and the startup of the Bare Campsite program at FHSR.
- More door-to-door canvassing in the Fairmont area on weekends to reach all residents and second homeowners to discuss attractant management.

## Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC wants to acknowledge the continued funding and support from: Columbia Basin Trust, District of Invermere, Village of Radium Hot Springs, Regional District of East Kootenay, British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. Thank you to the time and effort of Kindry Luyendyk - District of Invermere, Susan Clovechuk - Director of Area F, Mark Reid and Gary Burford - Village of Radium Hot Springs, Gerry Wilkie - Director of Area G, CO Greg Kruger and CO Matt Hall – Conservation Officer Service, Bylaw Officer Mark Topliff – District of Invermere, Linda Pfeiffer - Fairmont Community Association, Groundswell Network Society Apple Rescue, Margret Feldman - Agri-Park Farmers Market Windermere, Wildsight Invermere, Baiba Morrow, Karen Barkely, volunteer Kaori Maruyama, and the BCCF Team.