

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Radium Hot Springs and RDEK Areas F & G

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Executive Summary

This report describes the highlights from the delivery of the Radium Hot Springs and the Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK) Areas F & G WildSafeBC programs, which ran from May 13th until November 30th, 2019. Activities conducted during this period focused primarily on public outreach and education. This was achieved through door-to-door visits, attractant monitoring, fruit gleaning referrals, event attendance, and the delivery of various presentations and workshops.

This year, WildSafeBC focused on increasing the use and acceptance of bear spray. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), organized and delivered five workshops to provide hands-on training with inert bear spray. In total, 63 people participated and feedback was overwhelmingly positive. New to the role this year, the WCC found these workshops to be particularly rewarding and a highlight of the season.

Increasing public awareness on bear spray happened to coincide with an increase in black bear reports this season. In 2019, there were 166 reports to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) regarding black bears throughout the program coverage area. Many reports involved sows with cubs and juvenile animals trying to carve out territory. Although natural berry crops were abundant, residential fruit trees also had high yields in some areas. Fruit trees continue to be amongst the top three key wildlife attractants in the area and a challenge to address.

Despite difficulties in reaching short-term residents regarding fruit tree management on their properties, the WCC was able to contact over 1,700 residents through door-to-door education. An additional 2,200 people were reached at public display booths during a total of 19 events, and 194 people attended eight presentations. Three hundred students also graduated from our newly revised WildSafe Rangers Program.

In 2019, the WildSafeBC Columbia Valley Facebook page grew 12%, from 548 to 616 page likes. The WCC worked to establish and maintain a presence on social media with 42 posts that contributed to a reach of 46,500. In addition, five press releases were submitted to the Columbia Valley Pioneer and the paper brought attention to WildSafeBC events and activities on three additional occasions. Overall, these efforts reached an estimated 44,800 people.

Program delivery was well received throughout the coverage area (fig. 1-3). Collaborating with the Radium Public Library provided an excellent opportunity and venue to reach members of the public and deliver the WildSafe Ranger programming throughout the summer months. Partnerships with community associations, as well as support from the COS also greatly contribute to the success of the program.

Moving forward, reaching second home owners and visitors during the spring and summer months should be a priority. A one-page mail out to be included with a tax and/or utility notice may be an effective tool to reach these short-term residents. Overall, challenges were limited and the majority of the public is doing what they can to help "keep wildlife wild and our communities safe."

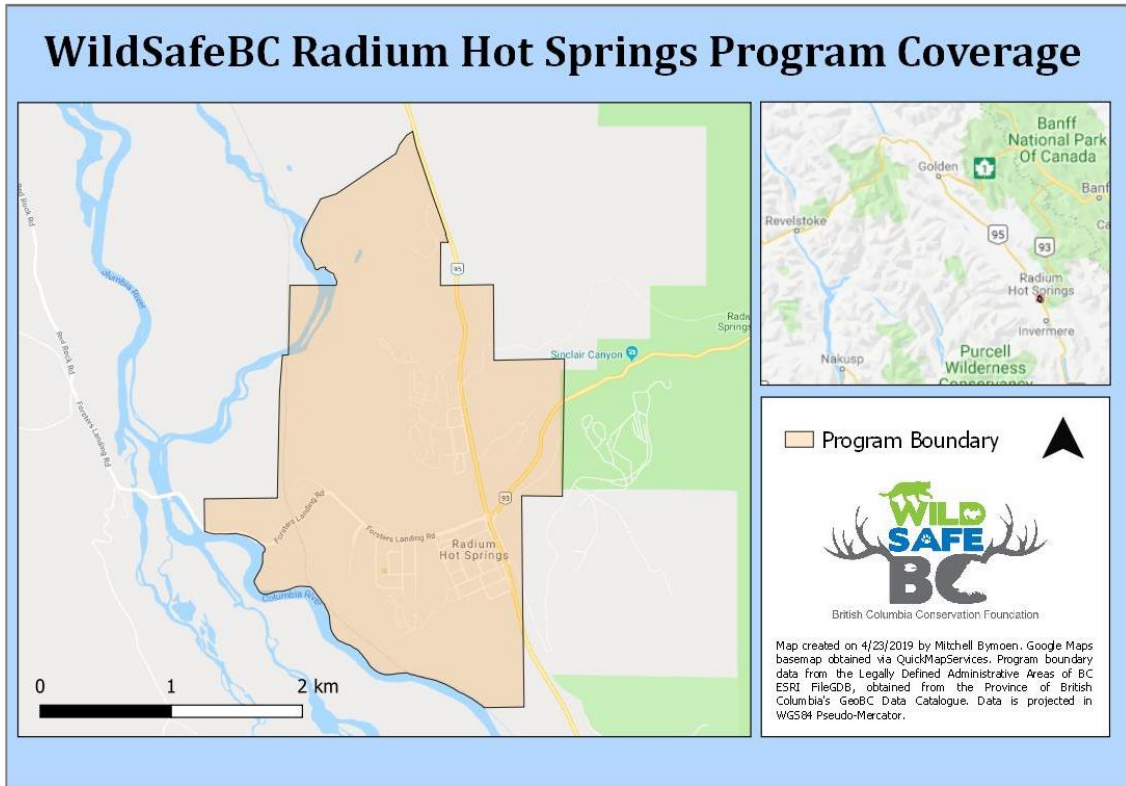


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Radium Hot Springs program coverage area.

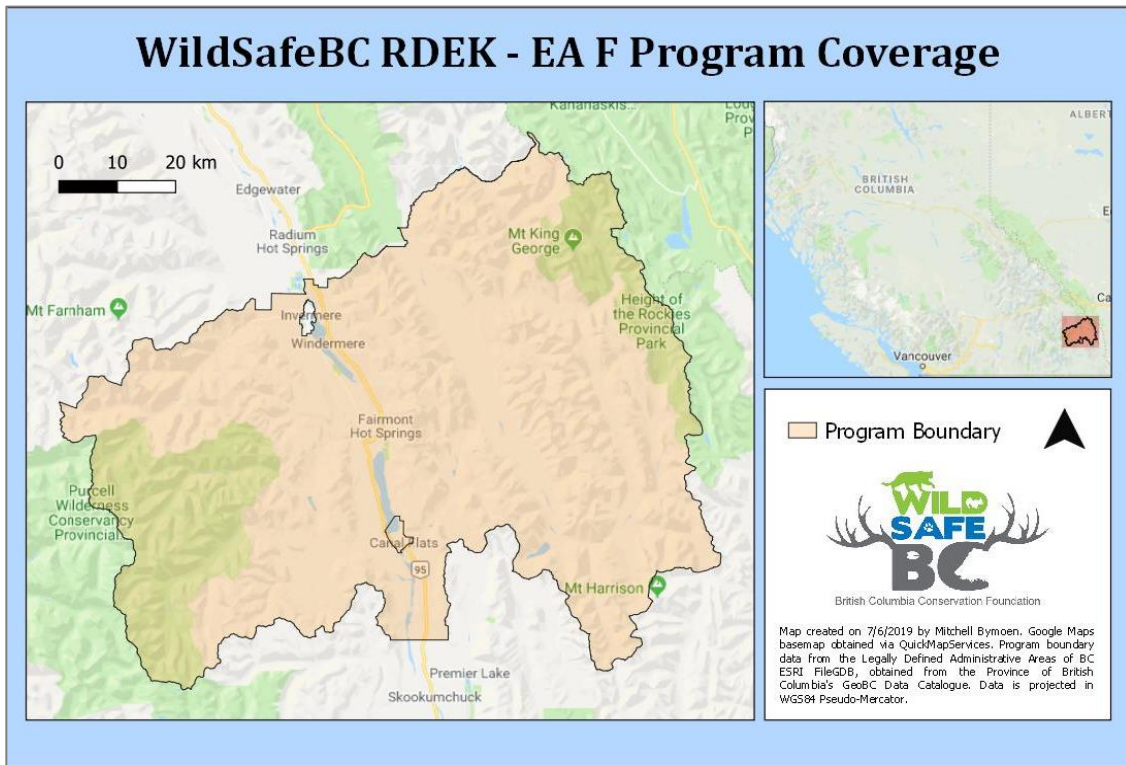


Figure 2. WildSafeBC RDEK Area F program coverage area.

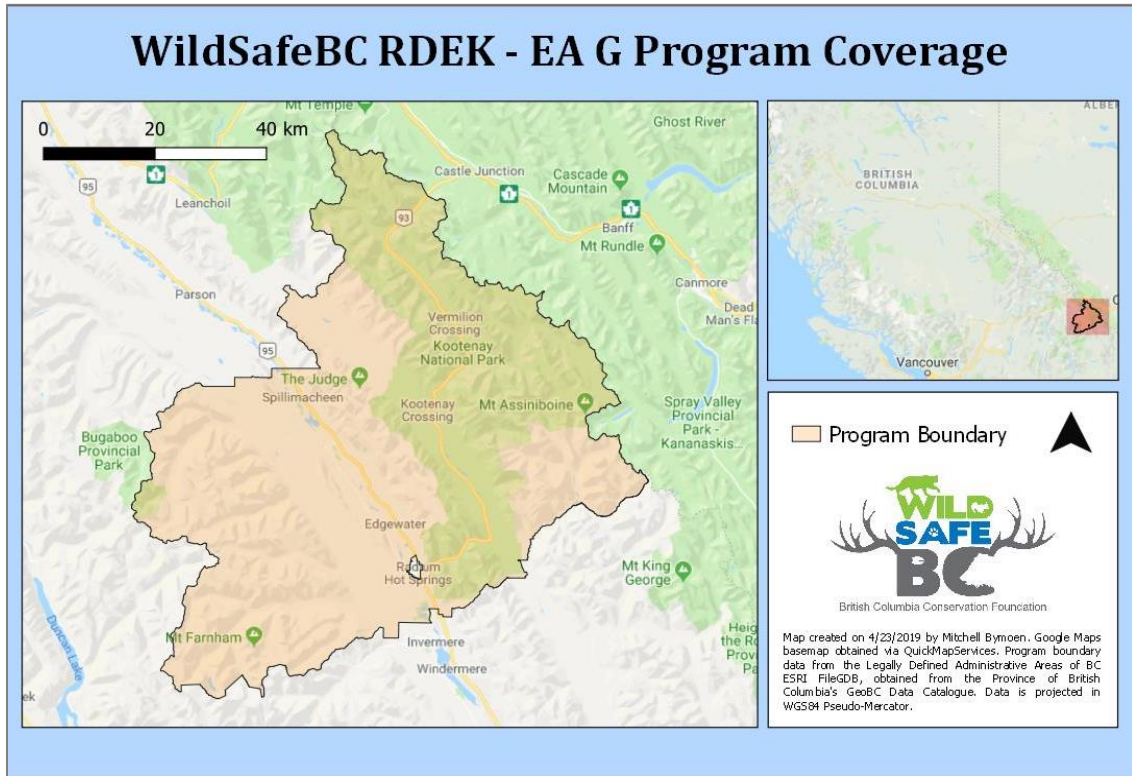


Figure 3. WildSafeBC RDEK Area G program coverage area.

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Cover photo: WildSafeBC informational booth set up at the annual Teddy Bear Picnic event, hosted by the Radium Public Library.

Highlights from the 2019 Season

Wildlife Activity

Calls made to the COS through the Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) line (1-877-952-7277) are available to the public through WARP. Data is uploaded daily and presented on a geo-referenced map. This report for Radium Hot Springs and the RDEK Areas F & G includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019 (fig. 4).

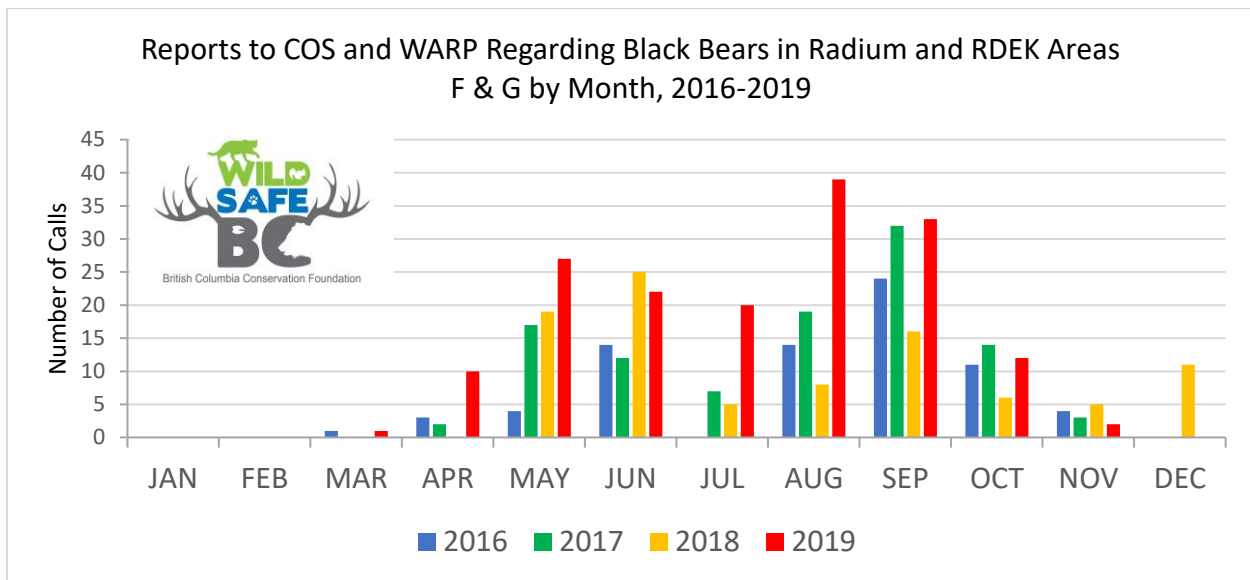


Figure 4. Black bear reports for Radium and communities within the RDEK Areas F & G - 2016 to November 15, 2019.

Thus far in 2019, there have been 166 black bear reports, which is higher than any of the previous three years (fig. 5). This appears to be on trend, as black bear reports to the COS have also been higher throughout most of the province. Locally, many reports seem to involve sows with cubs and juvenile bears. These young animals may be trying to carve out territory. In regards to deer reports, conflict was on par with that seen in 2018 (fig. 5). Although there was a spike in cougar activity last year, reports for 2019 have returned to a number that aligns more closely with the amount of conflict seen throughout 2016 and 2017 (fig. 5). Wild sheep and elk reports also appear to be on par with previous years (fig. 5).

Like black bear reports, conflict with 'other' species also rose this season (fig. 5). Twenty-five reports were made this year versus ten in 2018. Within this category, grizzly bears were responsible for the majority of reports to the COS and WARP. These reports don't necessarily reflect increased conflict, but instead sightings reported by the general public. Over half of grizzly bear sightings occurred near Panorama during the spring. Coyotes, wolves, moose, raptors and mountain goats were also included in this category.

In Radium Hot Springs, black bear activity was quite low compared to other communities within the program coverage area. Only ten sightings were reported throughout 2019, versus 67 reports of black bear activity in Fairmont during the same period of time. Half of those ten reports involved a sow with cub(s) moving throughout the trail system in Sinclair Canyon.

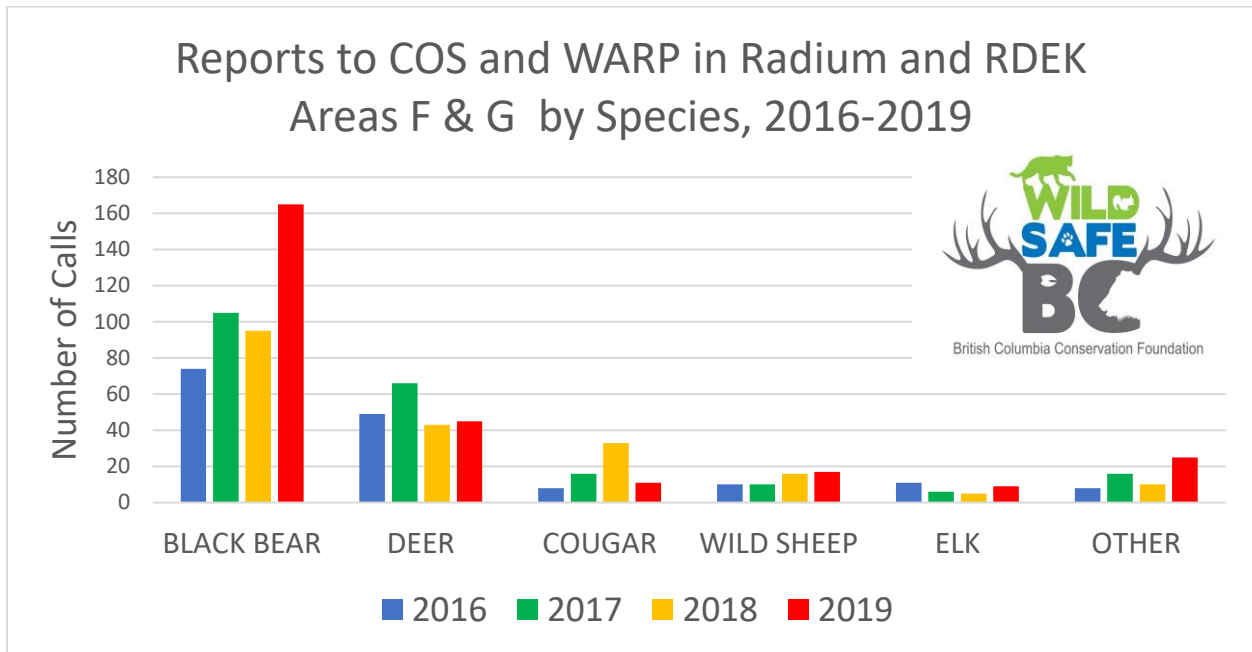


Figure 5. Reports to COS and WARP in Radium and the RDEK Areas F & G by species, 2016-2019.

Garbage remains the most reported attractant followed by fruit trees. Birdfeeders, which were included in the ‘other’ attractant category, were the third most reported attractant (fig. 6).

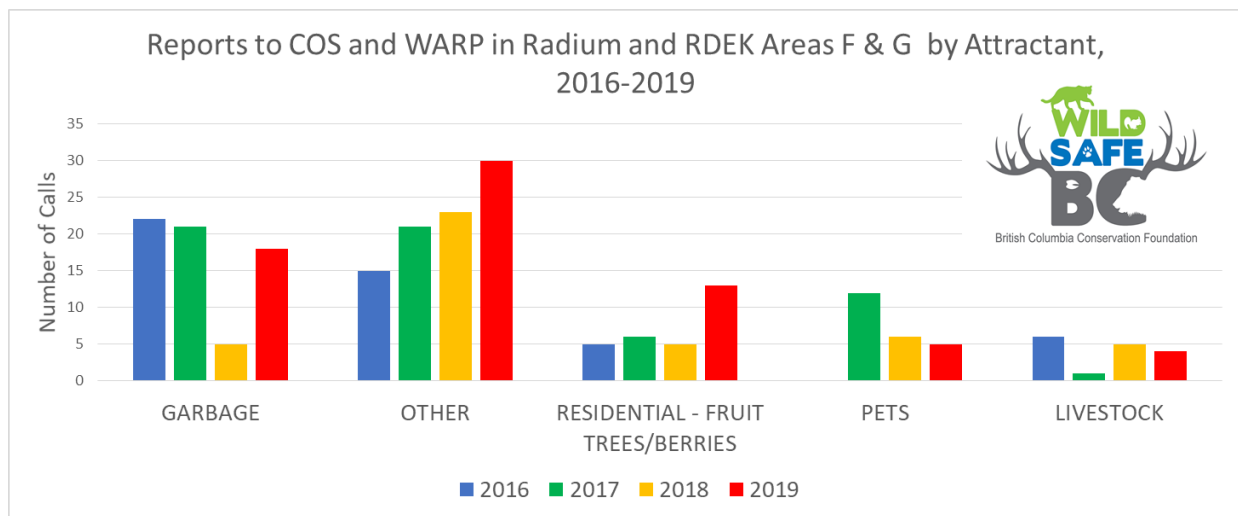


Figure 4. Reports to COS and WARP in Radium and the RDEK Areas F & G by attractant, 2016-2019.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WCC gave 19 WildSafe Ranger presentations throughout the season. The program was delivered to one preschool, three elementary schools and three summer programs. In total, 300 students graduated as WildSafe Rangers, gaining a better understanding of human-wildlife

conflict (Table 1). Of these, 18 students participated in the extended version of the program. The extended version is designed to engage students in a more in-depth understanding of human-wildlife conflict. This is achieved through two classroom visits, as well as a take home assignment on attractant management that was reviewed in class.

Table 1. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2019.

School	Grade	Students	Extended
Mountain Ridge	Preschool	30	
Shuswap Day Camp	Summer Program	9	
Radium Public Library	Summer Program	44	
Adventure Radium	Summer Program	55	
Martin Morigeau Elementary School - Canal Flats	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	63	
Edgewater Elementary School	K, 1, 2, 3, 4	81	
Windermere Elementary School	3, 4	18	Yes

All students received a WildSafe Ranger tool kit to take home at the end of each presentation. WildSafe Rangers understand the importance of sharing the information that they have learned with others and the tool kit is a great way to do so. The kit contains an activity guide, species brochure and other miscellaneous items that helps to bring class room learning into the home. Most human-wildlife conflict is preventable, students are therefore encouraged to play an active role at home by helping their families identify backyard wildlife attractants.

Wildlife safety is also a very important component of the WildSafe Ranger program. In addition to learning about attractant management, students are also taught how to avoid bear encounters and how to respond if they see a bear or other wild animal. This portion of the program was particularly well received by students and teachers alike (fig.7).



Figure 5. Edgewater Elementary students graduate from the WildSafe Rangers program.

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave a total of 8 presentations to 194 participants. These presentations primarily revolved around wildlife safety and awareness (Table 2).

Table 2. Presentations to community groups during the 2019 season.

Group	Location	Participants	Topic
Panorama Staff Orientation	Panorama	75	Wildlife Safety and Awareness
Mountain View Suites Staff Orientation	Fairmont	17	Wildlife Safety and Awareness
Fairmont Mountainside Vacation Villas	Fairmont	25	Wildlife Safety and Awareness
Sunchaser Vacation Villas	Fairmont	9	Wildlife Safety and Awareness
Radium Public Library	Radium	7	Wildlife Safety and Awareness
BC Goes Wild	Radium	21	“Bare” Camping / Staying Safe in Bear Country
BCSTA Kootenay Boundary Branch	Fairmont	35	WildSafe Ranger Program Overview
Headbanger Festival	Radium	5	Urban Wildlife

Public Displays and Events

The WCC attended 20 community held events and reached 2,200 people via an informational booth (fig. 8). Setting up a display booth at farmers' markets throughout the summer season was a great way to spread WildSafeBC messaging and engage with reach short-term visitors, and long-term residents alike.

- Lake Lillian Family Fishing Weekend (Hosted by Lake Windermere Rod and Gun Club)
- National Indigenous People's Day (Hosted by Shuswap Band)
- Radium Hot Springs Market and Music on Main (X9)
- Steamboat Mountain Music Festival
- WhiteSwan Provincial Park Campground
- Valley Appreciation Day
- Teddy Bear Picnic (Hosted by Radium Public Library)
- Akisqnuq First Nation Annual General Assembly
- BC Goes Wild - Invermere Farmers' Market
- BC Goes Wild Event (Co-hosted by the Radium Public Library)
- Windermere Elementary Community Carnival
- Radium Hot Springs Headbanger Festival – guided hike



Figure 6. Children visit the WildSafeBC booth at the Radium Library's annual Teddy Bear Picnic event.

This year coincided with WildSafeBC's 4th annual BC Goes Wild event. During September, human-bear conflicts are typically at their highest. BC Goes Wild is an event that is intended to bring awareness to human-bear conflict and promote best practices for living and recreating in wildlife country. The WCC partnered with the Invermere WCC to host a single day of activities on September 7th, 2019.

During the morning, a booth was set up at the Invermere Farmers' Market, which was visited by nearly 200 people. Family friendly activities were scheduled for the afternoon at the Radium Public Library. There were 21 people that attended the afternoon portion. Activities included a scavenger hunt, a bear spray demonstration, a "bare" camping demonstration, a campfire with s'mores, and a viewing of the short film, 'Staying Safe in Bear Country'. Thank you to members of the COS for attending and participating in our event, the Radium Public Library for co-hosting and Radium Mountainside Market for their donation of bottled water.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

The WCC visited 568 residences or businesses during door-to-door education. Door-to-door education was used to promote awareness when dangerous wildlife was known to be in an area. This type of outreach was also used proactively, to bring attention to backyard wildlife attractants and encourage people to report sightings of dangerous wildlife to the RAPP line. If a resident was not home, they received educational materials via a yellow door hanger. The area covered by this program has an abundance of seasonal vacation homes. Leaving a door hanger is one way to deliver information to residents of secondary homes, whom are not always present.

Garbage tagging is not an activity that could be carried out because there is no curb-side garbage collection within this program coverage area. Instead of garbage tagging residential bins, the WCC placed stickers on high-use commercial bins to help ensure that they remained latched and secure when not in use (fig. 9).



Figure 7. Bear aware sticker placed on commercial bin in an area with known bear activity.

Social Media and Press

In 2019, the WildSafeBC Columbia Valley Facebook page grew 12%, from 548 to 616 page likes. The page is run jointly and contributions are made by provincial staff, the Radium/RDEK WCC, and the Invermere WCC. From January through until the end of November, the page had an overall reach of 46,500. The WCC made 42 posts throughout the season, some of which were picked up by East Kootenay News Online Weekly (E-KNOW). The most effective post engagements were as follows:

- Bear Activity in Canal Flats
- WildSafe Ranger Program Delivery in Edgewater
- Coyote Activity in Canal Flats
- Black Bear Activity in Fairmont (x2), and
- Rocky Mountain Rally / Wildlife Collision Prevention Program

The WCC also submitted five press releases to the Columbia Valley Pioneer, including an article highlighting the annual BC Goes Wild event (<https://www.columbiavalleypioneer.com/community/bc-goes-wild-event-this-fall/>).

In addition, The Pioneer brought attention to WildSafeBC events and activities on three occasions. Overall, these efforts reached an estimated 44,800 people (based on reach of publication). The WCC also brought attention to upcoming events through The Valley Peak, a local community events paper with a reach of 1,600 people.

Wildlife in Area Signs

The WCC used information provided by WARP, as well as direct communication with the COS, to focus efforts in areas where sightings or conflict had recently occurred. When human-wildlife conflict was reported in an area, the WCC would visit the neighbourhood and place a 'Bear in Area' sign at a highly visible location (fig. 10). The WCC would also perform door-to-door education in the immediate area to inform residents of the recent activity and explain the importance of attractant management. At times when report volumes were high throughout the program coverage area, and signs were limited, the WCC would work with businesses and community associations to develop their own signage.



Figure 8. Bear in area sign at campground.

Collaborations

This season, the WCC worked to foster existing relationships as well as develop new collaborations. The success of the Fairmont Community Association's (FCA) fruit picking efforts continues to grow from year to year. The WCC worked to connect community members who were unable to pick their fruit trees, with the FCA volunteer base. The WCC was able to attend a fruit picking event scheduled by the FCA and was impressed by the number of volunteers who dedicate their time to help manage attractants within the community (fig. 11).



Figure 9. A member of the Fairmont Community Association volunteers her time to pick apples from a tree.

The WCC developed a strong working relationship with the Radium Public Library. There were 13 presentations which were delivered from this venue on topics that included wildlife safety, bear spray use, and attractant management.

The WCC also took direction from, and worked closely with, the COS and the Radium Hot Springs bylaw officer to assist in educating the public on attractant management where needed.

Province-wide Initiatives for 2019

WildSafeBC focused on two initiatives in 2019: increased use and acceptance of bear spray and increased Indigenous awareness and engagement.

Bear Spray

The WCC organized five workshops throughout the season. In total, 63 participants received hands on training with inert bear spray. The WCC found these workshops to be very rewarding and participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Survey responses indicated that participants found these workshops to be 'extremely helpful' and the information provided would 'very likely' help them to make better choices to increase safety and reduce conflicts with wildlife.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

This season, the WCC worked to build relationships with local First Nations communities. In June, the WCC engaged with crowds at the National Indigenous Peoples Day celebration hosted by the Shuswap Band. The celebration included powwow demonstrations and highlighted ancient cultural practices through lessons on the construction of pine-needle baskets. The WCC was very appreciative at having been included in the event.

In August, the WCC delivered the WildSafe Ranger Program to youth attending the Shuswap Day Camp, and an informational booth was set up at Akisqnuq's annual general assembly.

Challenges and Opportunities

A recurring theme and challenge from year to year appears to involve the management, or lack thereof, of fruit trees throughout the area. As mentioned, the FCA has taken an active role to address the issue. Elsewhere, a coordinated effort has not been established primarily due to a lack of volunteers. The WCC inquired about the apple rescue program operated by Groundswell Network, however at this point in time they are only operating the program in the neighbouring community of Invermere. With few alternatives available, the WCC attempted to connect residents with a local social media food-sharing group. Reaching absent owners with unpicked fruit was particularly challenging.

To address the issue of fruit tree management, the following opportunities should be explored in 2020:

- Continue to work towards reaching second-home owners. Focus outreach and education early in the season
- Consider hosting an electric fence workshop
- Continue to bring attention to fruit tree management through social media posts and news articles in the local paper
- Work with community associations to identify hotspots early in the season
- Support community associations in developing local fruit picking initiatives
- Continue to direct residents to existing fruit picking groups where applicable
- Bring attention to fruit tree management through a one-page mail out to be included with a tax and/or utility notice

Throughout the season, the WCC also noticed that many people were either unaware of the RAPP line or did not understand the importance of reporting sightings of dangerous wildlife in the community. It is believed that bear conflict throughout the program coverage area is higher than what the WARP data indicates. Through door-to-door visits and public displays, the WCC worked to bring attention to the COS 24-hour hotline number (1-877-952-7277). Reporting bear activity allows for proactive management solutions and encouraging residents to use the RAPP line should continue to be a priority in future years.

Another challenge came from bears accessing dumpsters that were not bear-proof. In these situations, the WCC worked to encourage the replacement of these dumpsters with bear-resistant models and also provided alternative solutions by recommending the use of carabiners to secure lids. A lack of bear-resistant recycling receptacles was also noted at some provincial and private campgrounds. Again, the WCC provided information and advice to remedy the issue. WhiteSwan Provincial Park is scheduled to have bear-resistant recycling bins for use in 2020.

As for opportunities, the WCC sees a need to continue running bear spray workshops in upcoming years. Overall, most people seem to carry bear spray, but few people have actually discharged it. Hands-on training is an excellent tool to increase confidence surrounding bear spray use.

The WCC was not able to deliver the WildSafe Ranger Program to all classes throughout the program coverage area and therefore believes that program delivery can be expanded further. The WildSafe Ranger program presents an excellent opportunity to not only reach and teach students about human-wildlife conflict, but also their family and friends. The WCC has received great feedback explaining how excited a child can be to share this information with his/her parents/guardians. The reach of this program delivery extends past the classroom and should be capitalized on.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following organizations and individuals for their support of the Radium Hot Springs and RDEK Areas F & G WildSafeBC program in 2019:

- Columbia Basin Trust
- Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy
- British Columbia Conservation Foundation
- Village of Radium Hot Springs, Mark Read, Clara Reinhardt, Gary Burford, Jill Logan, Emily Mitchell
- Regional District of East Kootenay, Gerry Wilkie (Area G), Susan Clovechok (Area F)
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- WildSafeBC Invermere, Jenna Milne
- WildSafeBC Provincial Team
- Radium Public Library, Jacqueline Wagner
- Fairmont Mountainside Market