

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

Columbia Valley

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Executive Summary

This report describes the WildSafeBC Columbia Valley Program's activities between April 11 and November 30, 2021. The WildSafeBC Columbia Valley Program is located on the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa First Nation and the Secwépemc Peoples, within the District of Invermere (Figure 1), the Village of Radium Hot Springs (Figure 2) and Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK) Area F & G (Figure 3). Throughout these areas the two WildSafeBC Community Coordinators (WCC) educated residents and visitors to the area on how to live and recreate safely in bear country.

Overall, the summer was quiet in regards to black bear reports in the area, likely as a result of early natural food availability due to the hot weather experienced. However bear activity picked up significantly in Radium at the end of August, September and October, and similarly in Invermere. This mirrored similar experiences in other communities in the Province.

In Radium, towards the end of August, there were multiple sightings of two families of black bears in the Sinclair Creek area. One bear was destroyed due to conflict in the Canyon Creek RV Park, including eating two fawns behind a shed. Reports peaked again in October. Since the installation of the water troughs in the reclamation area, the wild sheep spent less time on the highway this summer however they still had a record number of reports this season. As always, there were regular deer reports mainly due to road traffic accidents but also during fawning season. Deer conflicts with dog owners continue to be a chronic issue in both communities.

In Invermere, reports of black bears spiked in September to record highs with reports of bears in garbage, fruit trees and in peoples' yards. There were over 50 deer reports, which is lower than other years but remains a high number for the area. There was nothing of note to mention with other species.

In RDEK Areas F & G, black bears continued to be the highest reported conflict species with a total of 144 reports, which is higher than the average of 94. Unmanaged attractants are an ongoing issue in Fairmont. Short-term rentals, second homeowners, and visitors to the area, are some of the ongoing challenges when trying to mitigate attractants. Black bears accessed unsecured commercial garbage trucks when the dumpster latches were faulty or not closed properly. Unmanaged fruit trees, bird feeders, and barbecues continue to be an ongoing issue in Fairmont and Areas F & G.

The WCC's performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in communities. Following COVID-19 safety precautions, several of the standard WildSafeBC program activities were modified to ensure proper sanitization and physical distancing measures were in place. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the season:

Invermere and Radium

- 17 WildSafe Ranger presentations reaching 363 youth
- 2 presentations given to community groups with 25 participants
- 277 people reached through door-to-door: 78 in person and 199 additional door hangers left

- During 16 outings, a total of 174 bins were tagged in Invermere and 9 received stickers more than once.
- 12 display booths and 1,900 people reached
- The WildSafeBC Columbia Valley page grew 38% in 2021 from 785 to 1084 page followers
- 6 businesses signed the WildSafeBC Business Pledge
- 3 campgrounds were contacted regarding the Bare Campsite Program

Fairmont Hot Springs and Area F

- 2 Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray clinics for staff training at Fairmont Hot Springs Resort and one Zoom presentation; 21 people attended.
- 40 people were reached through door-to-door canvassing and placement of door hangers.
- 7 display booths at the Agri-Park Market with 158 people reached.
- 4 WildSafe Ranger presentations and 80 youth reached at Windermere Elementary School and the Early Badgers Program.

Edgewater and Area G

- 3 WildSafe Ranger Presentations and 61 youth reached
- 1 Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray clinic; 15 people attended

This year the Columbia Valley Community Coordinators mainly collaborated with their sponsoring communities, the conservation officers, Groundswell Network Society and Wildsight BC.

Challenges during the season included the lack of attendance to free workshops and clinics. This may be a result of COVID-19 restrictions or concerns. There was also a reluctance by many campgrounds to adopt the Bare Campsite Program which could have helped prevent some of the conflicts witnessed this season.

Highlights of the season included positive public responses to education and the garbage tagging program which greatly reduced the number of bins set out early. A total of six businesses in the area signed up for the WildSafeBC Business Pledge and this engagement program should be prioritized for 2022. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

WildSafeBC Columbia Valley would like to thank our sponsors; The District of Invermere, Radium Hot Springs, The Columbia Basin Trust, British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and more.



Figure 1. Invermere program area coverage covered by WCC Natalie Ebsworth.

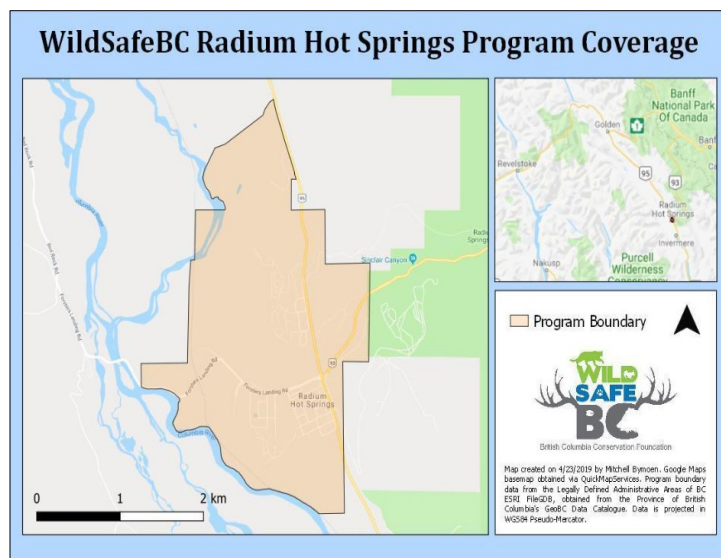


Figure 3. Radium program coverage area covered by WCC Natalie Ebsworth.

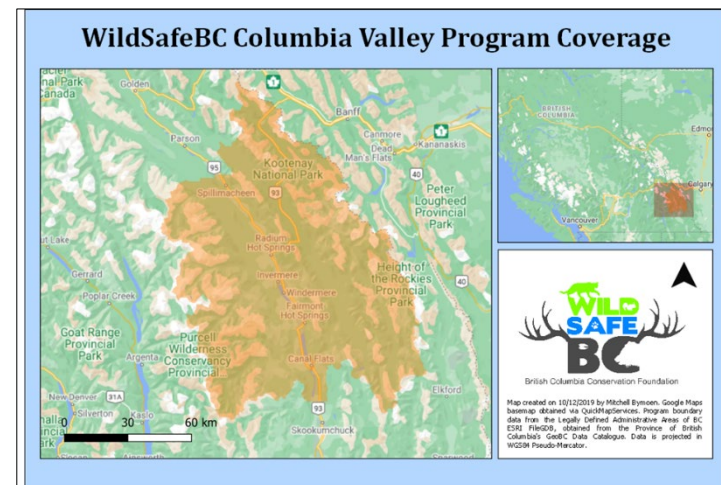


Figure 2. Columbia Valley RDEK Electoral Areas F and G covered by WCC Corinna Strauss.

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Highlights from the 2021 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). This data is updated daily and this reports includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021. It is important to note, that this data is a subset of wildlife activity and conflicts in the region as many people do not report these events to the COS.

Invermere

The expected highest number of reports annually are deer and the majority of deer reports are likely from road collisions or during fawning season. Several calls were received regarding deer aggressively protecting their fawns, especially in the presence of dogs being walked in the area. However this year, bears received the most number of calls (Figure 4). This is likely a result of the effects of the early heat wave and forest fires which lead to animals being dispersed and natural foods ripening early and then waning early in the season. As a result, many bears came into the community seeking out additional food sources.

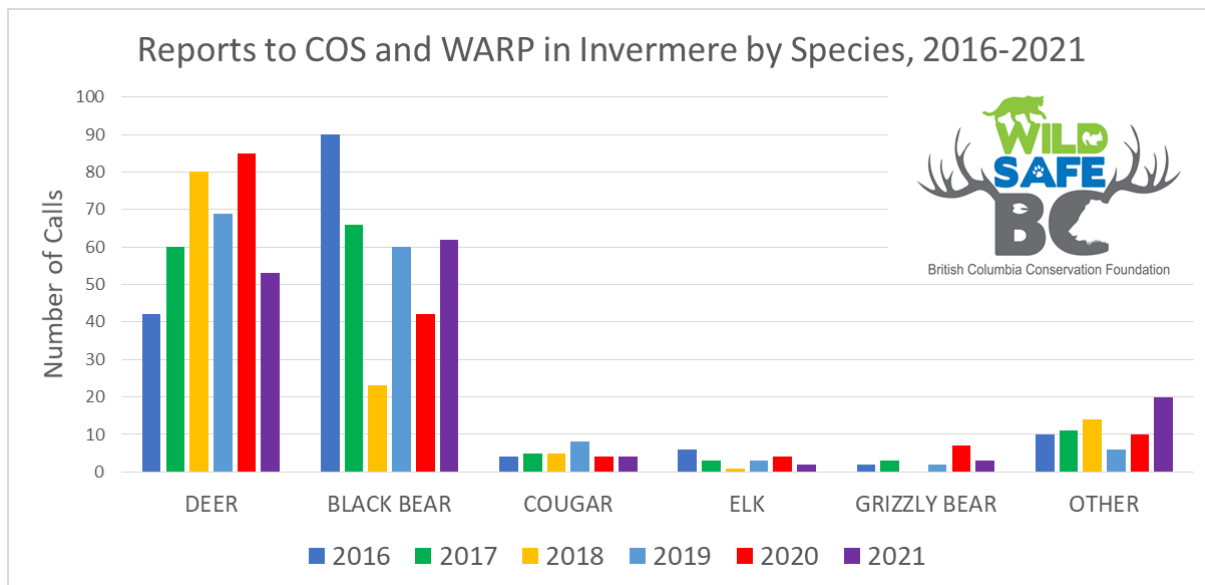


Figure 4. Reports to the COS regarding wildlife in Invermere from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

Over 60 bear sightings were recorded which higher than last year's reports (n=42) and slightly over the yearly average of 57. Of note, many of the reports were condensed with September and October having the highest monthly numbers on record since 2016 (Figure 5).

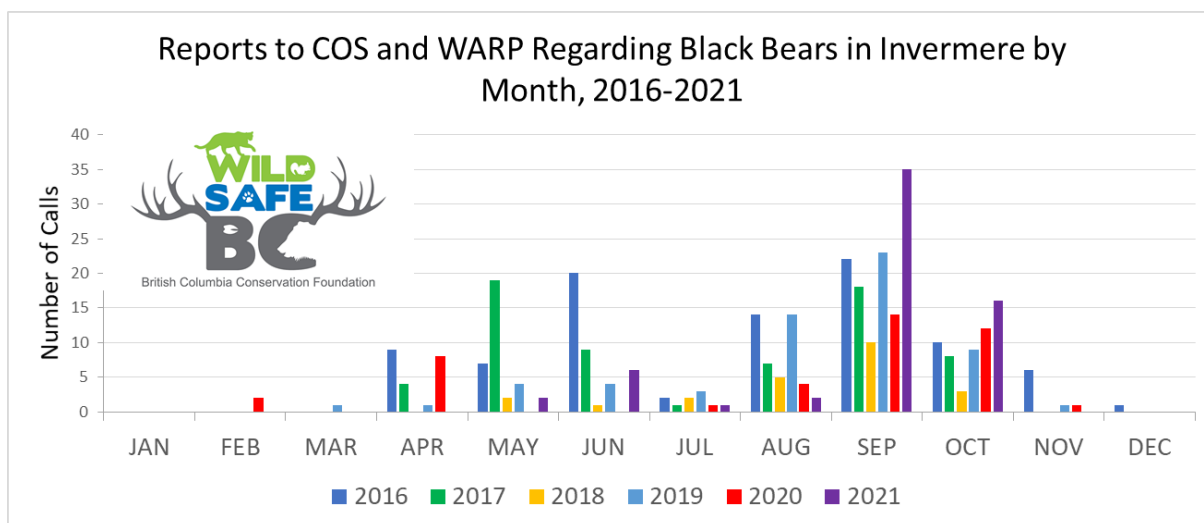


Figure 5. Black bear reports by month in Invermere from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

In 2021, when an attractant was noted, garbage was the most reported (n=16), followed by resident fruit trees (n=8) and livestock (n=5) (Figure 6).

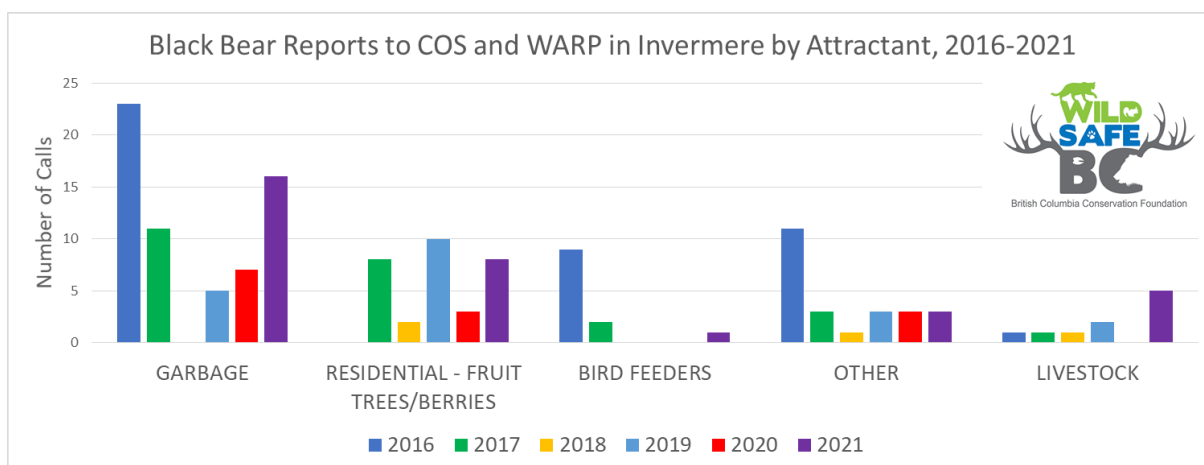


Figure 6. Reports to the COS regarding black bears where an attractant is noted from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

Radium

There were 24 black bear reports (Figure 7) which is almost double the 6 year average of 14. Towards the end of August, there were multiple sightings of two families of black bears in the Sinclair Creek area. One bear was destroyed due to conflict in the Canyon Creek RV Park, including eating two fawns behind a shed. The majority of the reports (n=18) occurred in October. The main attractants bringing the bears into town were garbage, fruit trees, bird feeders, livestock and commercial spaces. This year yielded the highest number of reports regarding wild sheep despite mitigation measures taking place, including the installation of

water troughs in the reclamation area. Deer were close to average but continue to find shelter in the community and access non-natural foods.

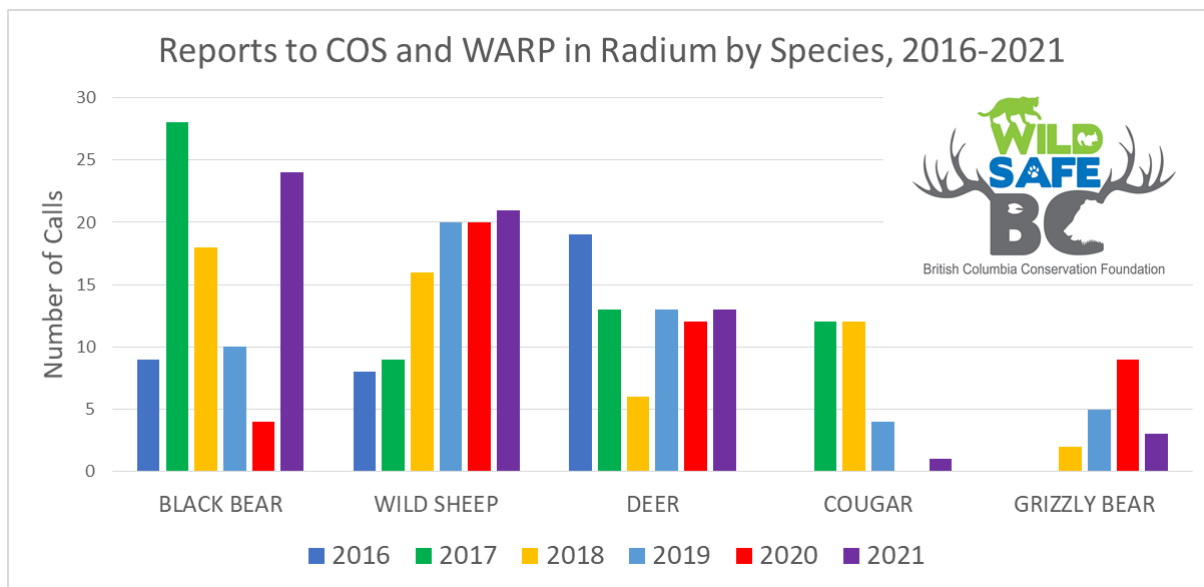


Figure 7. Reports to the COS regarding wildlife in Radium from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

RDEK Areas F & G

In RDEK Areas F& G, black bears continued to be the highest reported conflict species with a total of 144 reports, which is higher than the average of 94 (Figure 8). Deer reports (n=51) were close to average. Black bear reports were high throughout the season and continued well into October (Figure 9).

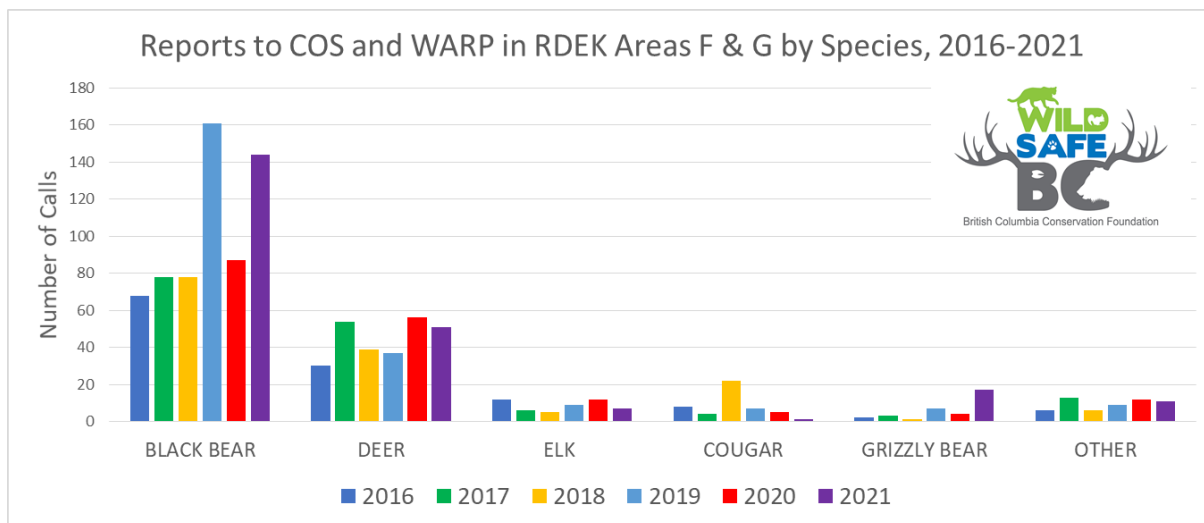


Figure 8. Reports to the COS regarding wildlife in RDEK Areas F and G from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

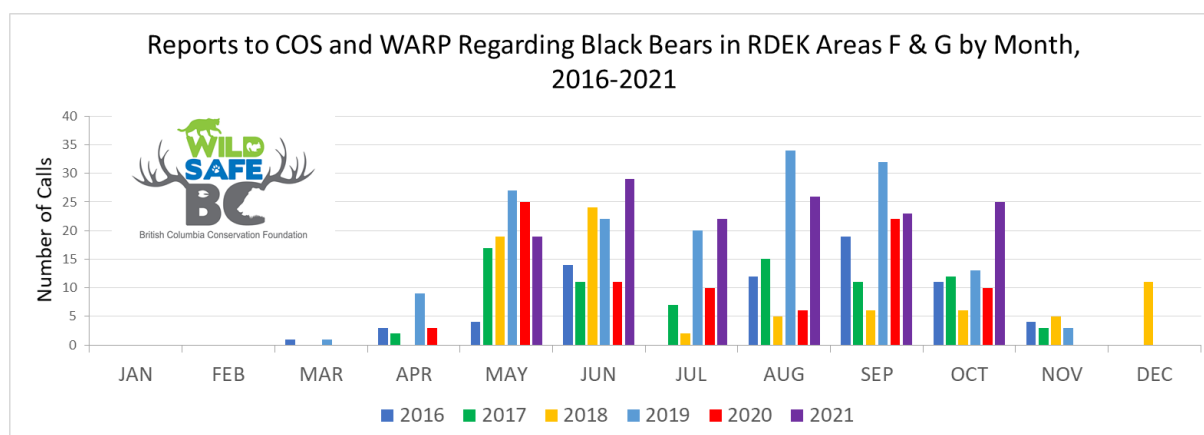


Figure 9. Black reports to the COS by month from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2021.

Unmanaged attractants were an ongoing issue in Fairmont. Short-term rentals, second homeowners, and visitors to the area lead to bears accessing unsecured garbage. Black bears accessed unsecured commercial garbage trucks 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 and RDEK Areas F & G.

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 for organizing events where people would congregate. 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 the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of three schools participated in the WRP through indoor and outdoor presentations that allowed for physical distancing. The WCC provided 17 presentations reaching 363 youth who became WildSafe Rangers and received kits (Table 1; Figure 10). This is over double the amount of students in the area from last year when the COVID-19 pandemic hindered this aspect of the program.

Table 1. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2021.

School	Area	Grade	Students	Date
Windermere Child Care Society	Invermere	Pre K - 3	19	16 Aug
Windermere Child Care Society	Invermere	Pre K-3	23	20 Aug
Edgewater Elementary School	Area G		61	23 Sep
J.A. Laird	Invermere	K-3	25	
Eileen Madison	Invermere	4	235	18-19 Oct



Figure 10. WildSafe Ranger presentation to school-aged children.

Presentations to Community Groups

Presentations and wildlife awareness and bear spray workshops were provided throughout the area. A total of 5 presentations were held with 69 people in attendance (Table 2). Attendance to some of the workshops was at times unpredictable and may have been a result of many stressors including COVID-19, unusual weather, and wildfires. The most successful events coincided with collaborations with other groups that were also organizing special events such as Bear Day (Figure 11).

Table 2. Presentations and workshops carried out in 2021.

Presentation	Area	Participants
Bear Spray Clinic (Bear Day)	Invermere	25
Wildlife Awareness and Safety (College of the Rockies – International Students)	Invermere	10
Bear Spray Clinic - BC Goes Wild Event	Radium	2
Wildlife Safety and Bear Spray Workshop - Edgewater	Area G	15
Wildlife Safety and Bear Spray Workshop – Fairmont Hot Springs staff	Area F	21



Figure 11. Bear spray clinic being provided by WildSafeBC during Bear Day

Display Booths

There were 20 display booths held with 7 in Invermere, 6 in Radium and 7 for Area F which often coincided with regular market days (Table 3). This was a successful way to reach over 2,100 people this season with 1,221 in Invermere, 732 in Radium and 158 in Area F. Education ranged from identifying wildlife signs and tracks, bear safety, attractant management, deer safety, and other topics around wildlife safety and conflict reduction (Figure 12).

Table 3. Booths attended in 2021.

Booth	Area	Date	Public Reached
Invermere Market	Invermere	19/06/2021	131
Market on Main – Radium	Radium	09/07/2021	87
Market on Main – Radium	Radium	23/07/2021	225
Invermere Market	Invermere	24/07/2021	295
Heart of the Rockies Triathlon – Kinsman Beach	Invermere	25/07/2021	54
Market on Main – Radium	Radium	06/08/2021	179
Invermere Market	Invermere	07/08/2021	318
Market on Main – Radium	Radium	20/08/2021	181
Bear Day – Pot Hole Park	Invermere	21/08/2021	231
Ray Brydon Dog Park	Invermere	18/09/2021	19
Oktoberfest - Invermere	Invermere	25/09/2021	173
BC Goes Wild - Radius	Radium	26/09/2021	7
Radium Visitors Center	Radium	02/10/2021	53
Agri-Park Market	Area F	7 events	158



Figure 12. Various booths held at events throughout the region helped engage the public and raise awareness.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

As in 2020 door-to-door education was modified this year to consist of leaving door hangers; the WCCs only knocked on doors when local COVID-19 numbers were lower and when it was advised by the Public Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry and BCCF’s Safety Coordinator that the risk of such events were low. Door-to-door activities were prioritized in areas experiencing wildlife conflicts or where attractant management was poor.

Through door-to-door education a total of 277 people were reached in Invermere and Radium (78 people in-person; 199 people receiving door hangers) and 40 people were reached in Fairmount. Hot spots included Tenth and Twelfth street in Invermere which needed the most communication throughout the season but improvements were seen towards the end of the season when more bear activity was being reported. Challenges remain with regards to short-term rentals and compliance with local wildlife attractant bylaws.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. In the region, only Invermere provides curbside collection. During 16 outings, a total of 174 bins were tagged in Invermere and 9 were received stickers more than once (Figure 13). The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours is demonstrated by the large 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.

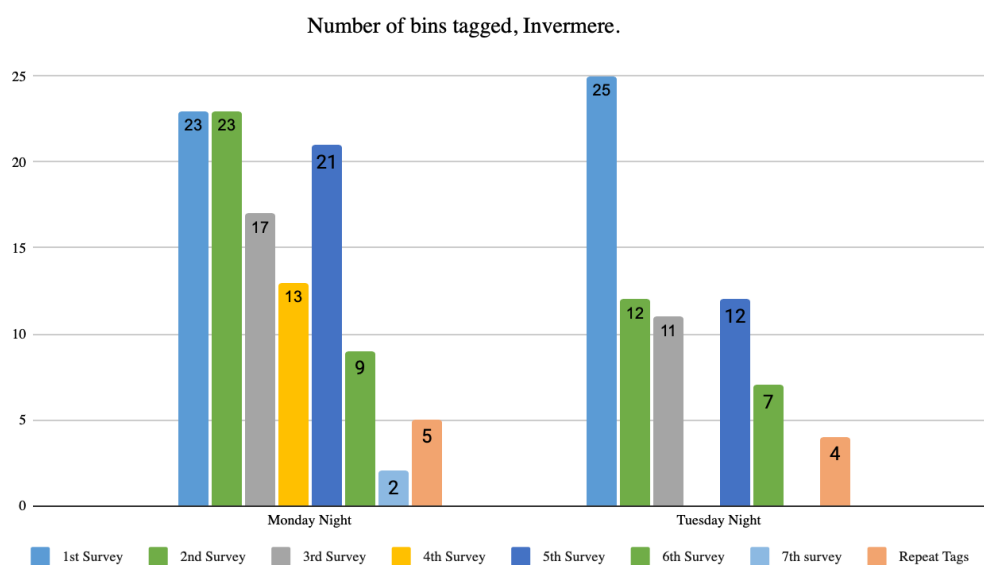


Figure 13. Number of bins receiving education stickers for setting carts out the night before collection in Invermere.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Columbia Valley page grew 38% in 2021 from 785 to 1084 page followers. The WCCs submitted multiple news articles to the Columbia Valley Pioneer mirroring the Facebook posts in more detail with the intention of reaching people who don't use or have access to social media.

Wildlife in Area Signs

Signage was displayed in response to reports called in by either the COS or local bylaw. The majority of signage put out this season was in Radium. Sinclair creek was a hotspot as well as in the grassy area at the end of Revelstoke Ave. Invermere saw 4 signs go out, two of which were near the bridge of Fort Point, 2 bear signs on 10th Ave, one by the hospital in November and

one earlier in the season the Sobey's end. Both bear-in-area and deer-in-area signs were deployed (Figure 14). The signs serve to alert people to the presence of higher wildlife activity and to take precautions such as avoiding the area with dogs, keeping attractants secure in the neighbourhood and being alert and aware of your surroundings.



Figure 14. Deer-in-area signs to warn trail users.

Collaborations

The WCCs also collaborated with other organizations and participated in events such as Bear Day which was hosted by Wildsight Invermere. A BC Goes Wild Event was held at Radius in Radium, involving a scavenger hunt, bear spray clinic and a WildSafe Ranger presentation. While providing education through door-to-door visits on fruit trees, the Groundswell Network Societies information was passed to households that didn't want to or couldn't pick their own fruit.

WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to be good examples in their community on how to safely co-exist with wildlife (Figure 15). 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. A total of 6 businesses signed the pledge this year, 1 in Radium and 5 in Invermere. The WCC emailed the majority of businesses in both towns and received 1 email back from the hundreds that were sent out. Once the WCC started to visit the companies in person much better results were seen. It is recommended that WildSafeBC Business Pledges are prioritized early on in the season and businesses are visited in person.



Figure 15. WildSafeBC Business pledge.

WildSafeBC 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. No campsites are currently participating in the Bare Campsite Program however three campsites were approached about the program. Some of the campgrounds may have benefitted from the program this season as some experienced human-bear conflicts. While this program is not new to Parks Canada, it is new to private campground owners and it may take more time for it to be more widely adopted.

Special Initiatives

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. On the 26th September the Columbia Valley Coordinators teamed up and hosted a scavenger hunt, bear spray clinic and WildSafe Ranger presentation. Despite the continued advertising in the paper and on social

media, attendance was low with seven people in attendance, five of which were from one homeschool family.

Challenges and Opportunities

Fruit trees continue to be a human source of food for wildlife in the community that draw animals into residential areas. Bears have been reported damaging fences and remaining in people's yards which impacts the safety of the neighbourhood. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community and would benefit from increased education and fruit gleaning activities such as 10th and 12th Ave and Fort Point in Invermere. To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2022:

- Electric fence demonstrations
- Education campaigns focused on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops
- Engage food banks and other non-profits
- Connect residents through a social media food sharing group
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots

Workshop attendance was a challenge throughout the season and should be initiated early when people need wildlife awareness and safety training as outdoor recreation season ramps up.

Acknowledgements

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