

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

## Invermere

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## Executive Summary

Highlights from the 2019 WildSafeBC Invermere Program included connecting with residents and visitors regarding wildlife safety and attractant management through: school visits, door-to-door education, public events, social media, press, and the use of public signage within the coverage area (fig. 1).

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) attended 7 public events connecting with over 900 people; gave 4 presentations to 75 people in community groups; presented the WildSafe Ranger presentation to over 200 students; and over 200 people were reached through door-to-door education. The WCC conducted 10 garbage tagging events which showed a decreasing trend in the number of garbage bins left curbside and available to wildlife the night before collection day. The WildSafeBC Columbia Valley Facebook page (shared with the WCC in Radium and RDEK Areas F & G) gained 12% more page likes and reached over 49,000 people. The WCC submitted two articles to the Columbia Valley Pioneer and was featured in several others. The “Welcome to Invermere” roadside message board was used to display key messages to thousands of residents and visitors.

Deer and black bear continued to be the highest conflict species in Invermere. In 2019, there were 60 black bear reports which is higher than last year’s total of 23, but on par with the three-year average of 60 reports. Two bears were destroyed in Invermere this season as they were accessing unsecured residential garbage and unmanaged fruit trees leading to habituation and food-conditioned behaviour. There were 55 reports of deer in conflict, some resulted in injuries to dogs. This is fewer than the 80 reports received in 2018, but close to the three-year average of 61.

The WCC collaborated with Groundswell Network Society in support of their Apple Rescue Program which organizes volunteers to pick apples from property owners who need assistance, mainly part-time homeowners and seniors. The WCC also partnered with the Conservation Officer Service in various endeavors including: Wildsight’s Ursus & Us Bear Day, an educational attractant review around the Fort Point neighborhood, the Columbia Valley Human-Wildlife Conflict Reduction Working Group, and communicating details of wildlife reports.

Challenges faced in Invermere continue to develop from improperly managed fruit trees and garbage stored outside. Focus for 2020 should include implementing educational campaigns using a variety of mediums, increasing door-to-door campaigns in hotspots, and continuing engagement with Groundswell’s Apple Rescue Program. An automated solid waste collection system with new, wildlife resistant carts, will begin in 2020, so opportunity should be taken to educate residents during the roll-out. Another goal is to update the *Bear Hazard Assessment and Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan* created in 2012 and continue work towards achieving Bear Smart Community status. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

The WCC wants to acknowledge the continued support from its sponsors: The District of Invermere, the Columbia Basin Trust, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the

BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, as well as the generous help from volunteers.



Figure 1. Map of WildSafeBC Invermere program coverage area.

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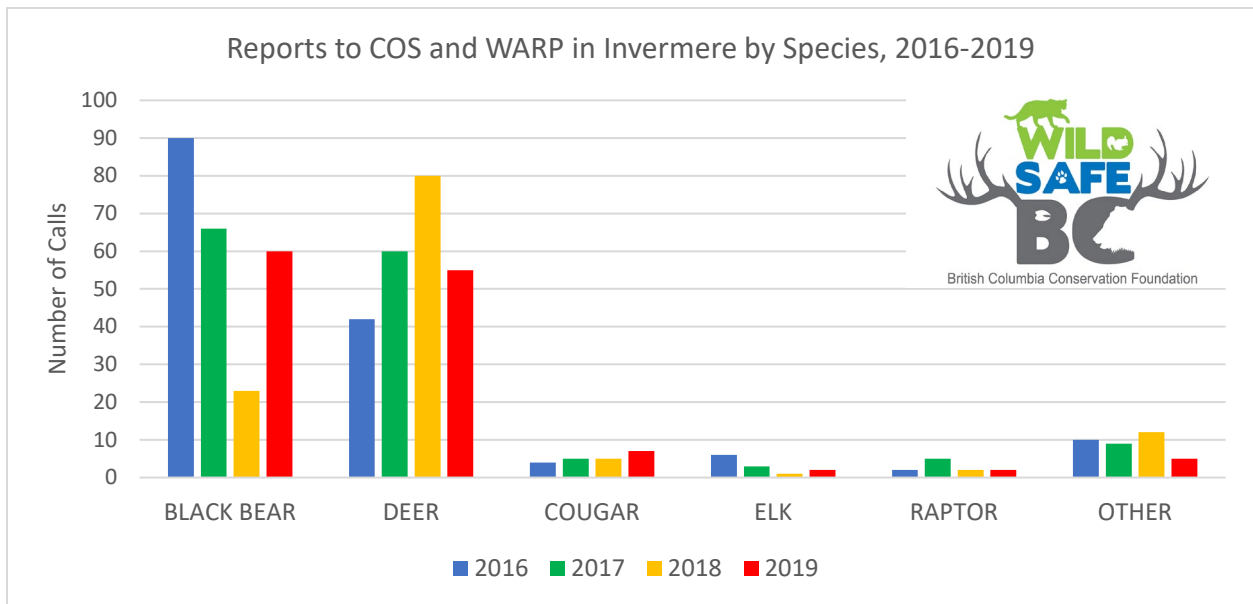
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Cover Photo: Young black bear in Pothole Park in the busy downtown area of Invermere

## Highlights from the 2019 Season

### Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) are available to the public through WildSafeBC’s Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). This data is updated daily and this report includes data from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 to November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019. As in past years, the top two species in conflict were black bear and deer (fig. 2).



**Figure 2. Number of reports to the COS and WARP by species from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.**

So far, in 2019 there have been 60 black bear reports which is on par with the three-year average of 60. Of these reports, 38% (23 out of 60) occurred in the month of September (fig. 3) and is on trend with provincial numbers (fig. 4) that reflect historically high bear conflict during autumn. This surge coincides with bears in the hyperphagia phase, eating as much as they can in preparation for winter denning.



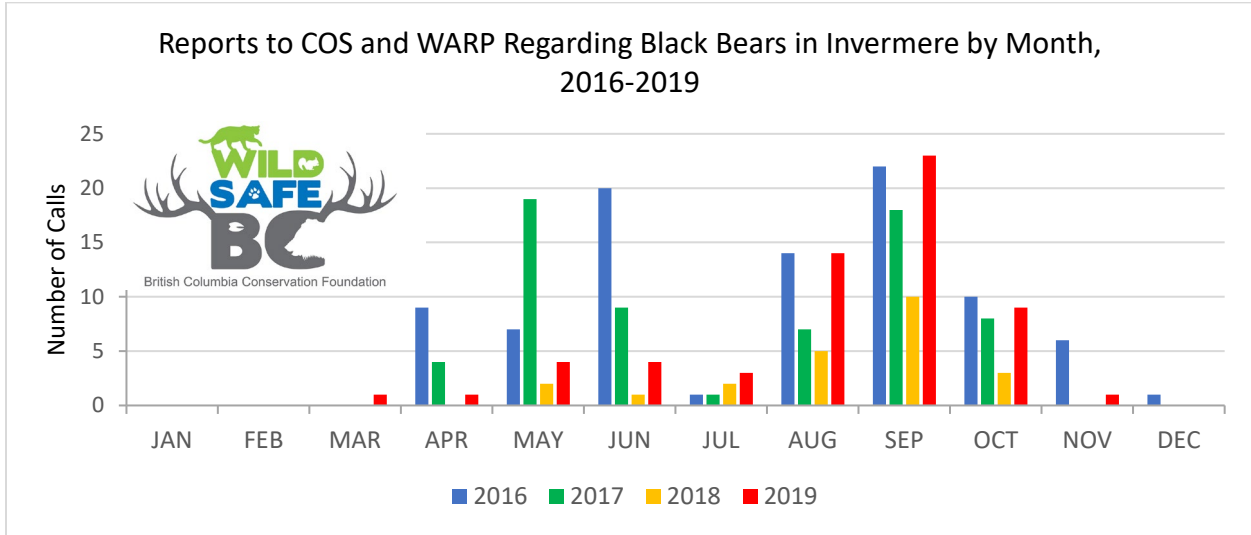


Figure 3. Monthly reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.

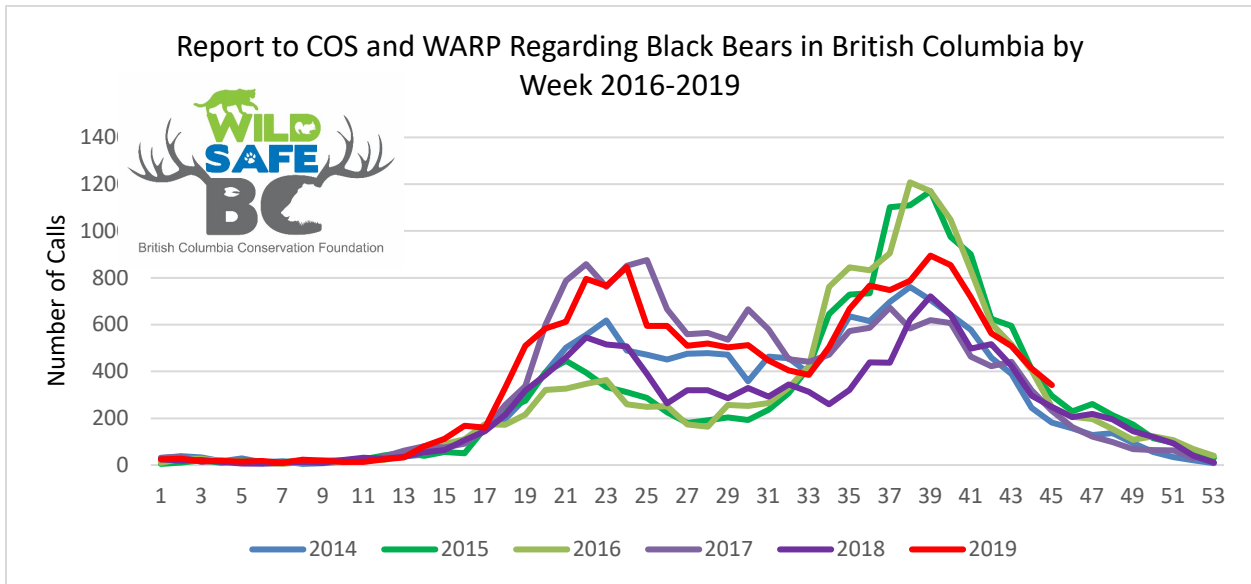


Figure 4. Weekly reports to COS and WARP regarding black bears in British Columbia, 2014 - 2019

There have been 55 deer reports in 2019 which is close to the three-year average of 61 (fig. 5). Deer reports across the province have been high the last few years (fig. 6), an increase that has been mirrored in Invermere. Urban deer find abundant food sources and shelter in communities. Once human-habituated and established in communities, conflicts can arise especially when does protect their fawns in the spring or during the fall rut.

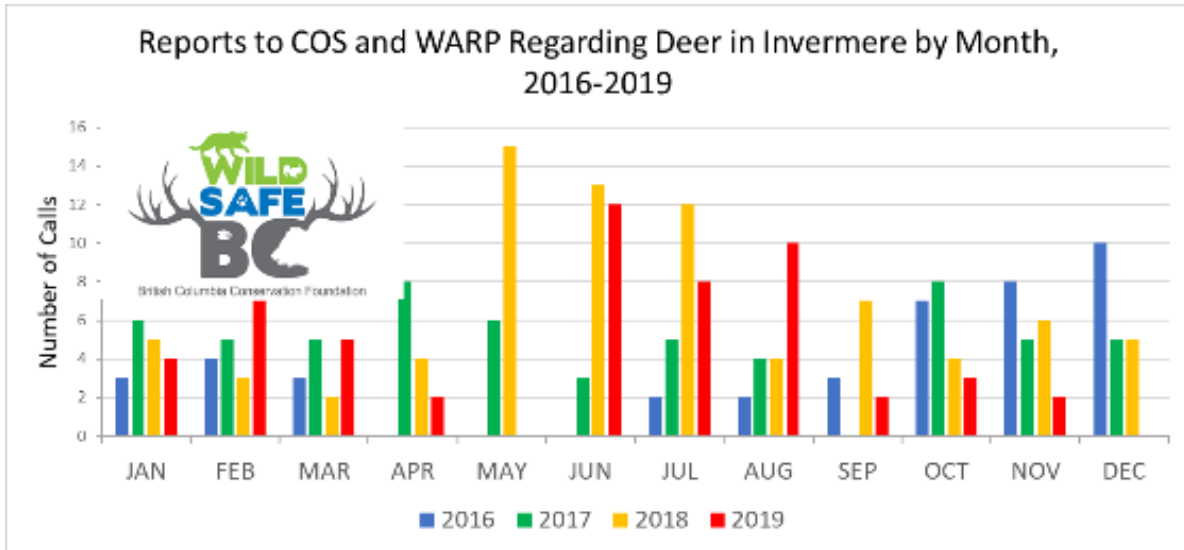


Figure 5. Monthly reports to the COS and WARP regarding deer from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.

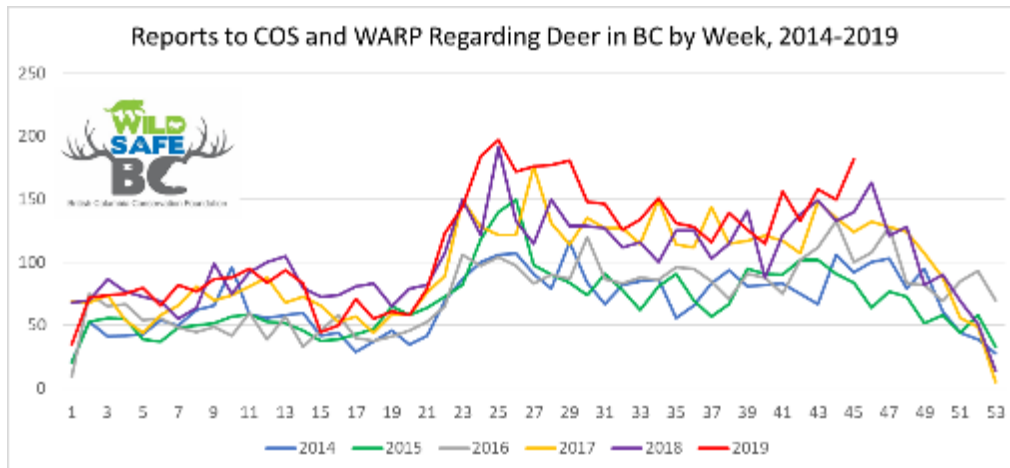


Figure 6. Weekly reports to COS and WARP regarding deer in British Columbia, 2014-2019

Over the past 4 years, garbage accounted for 32% of reported attractants (39 out of 122 reports) followed by residential fruit trees/berries at 17% (21 out of 122) (fig. 7). The prevalence of these anthropogenic attractants left accessible to wildlife indicates the need for continued public education.



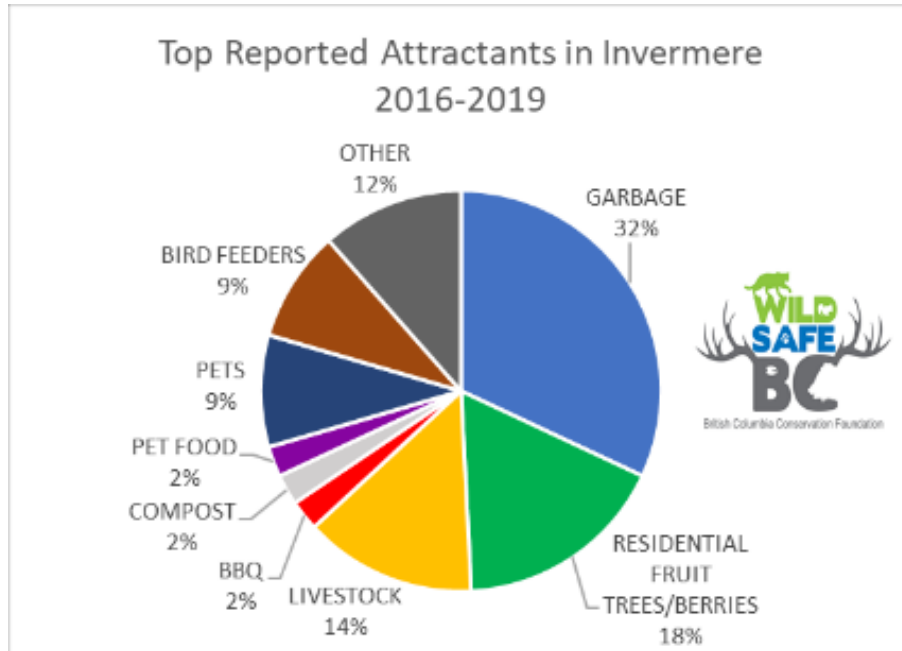


Figure 7. Top reported attractants to the COS and WARP in Invermere from 2016 - 2019.

The COS had to destroy two bears in Invermere this fall due to their habituated and food-conditioned behaviour. One subadult bear in Pothole Park was immobilized and translocated only to return within days to the Fort Point neighbourhood where fruit remained on some trees. The second subadult bear had been reported at numerous locations around town accessing fruit and garbage; it was immobilized near J. Alfred Liard Elementary School, removed and destroyed.

### WildSafe Ranger Program

In 2019, the Junior Ranger Program was renamed to WildSafe Ranger Program. This is a keystone of the WildSafeBC program. All 10 classes at Eileen Madson Primary School (K–3), plus the Strong Start group, and the Out of School group at Windermere Valley Child Care Society (fig. 8) participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program. Over 200 students became WildSafe Rangers and received WildSafe Ranger kits.



Figure 8. Students in the Windermere Valley Child Care Society’s Out of School program attained WildSafe Ranger status during the summer (photo credit: Tiffany).

## Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave a total of four presentations regarding wildlife awareness and safety to 75 participants (Table 1). Most took advantage of the opportunity to practice deploying bear spray using cans of inert that did not contain the active ingredient.

Table 1. Community groups that received WildSafeBC presentations in 2019.

Community Group	Topic of Presentation	No. of Participants
<b>College of the Rockies, international students</b>	Local Wildlife Introduction and Safety	21
<b>Wildsight’s Ursus &amp; Us Bear Day</b>	Bear Safety and Safe Use of Bear Spray (two presentations)	40
<b>Summit Trail Makers</b>	Bear Safety and Safe Use of Bear Spray	14

## Public Displays and Events

The WCC set up public displays at 7 events and interacted with over 900 people (Table 2). A bear mascot handed out WSBC black bear brochures on the streets of Invermere during Ursus & Us Bear Day, hosted by Wildsight (fig. 9). Greg Kruger with the COS also attended the event. They displayed a bear trap and immobilization gear and presented on their use.

Children were drawn to the fun wildlife props at the WSBC display booth at the Invermere Farmers and Artists Market (fig. 10). The market is a great way to interact with full-time/part-time residents as well as visitors.

Table 2. Public displays and events attended or hosted by WCC

Display or Event	No. People Reached
J.A. Liard Elementary School Environmental Education Fair	110
Ursus & Us Bear Day	100
Invermere Farmers and Artists Market x 4	683
BC Goes Wild event - Scavenger hunt, bear spray, bare camping, s'mores, Staying Safe in Bear Country video	21



Figure 9. Bear handing out high fives and WSBC black bear brochures at Bear Day (photo credit Pat Morrow).



Figure 10. Children inspecting animal tracks and scat at WSBC's display booth at farmers' market.

## Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

The WCC performed 25 door-to-door canvassing events, educating over 200 residents about proper attractant management, particularly garbage and fruit trees. This was also an opportunity to advise residents if there were bears reported in the area.

The WCC conducted 10 garbage tagging events and found that the number of bins left out the night before collection day decreased over the weeks (fig. 11). A total of 74 bins were left out early at 55 different residences. Of these, only 11 residences were repeat offenders, indicating the effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours for 82% of the residences whose bins were tagged. North and South Invermere have separate, consecutive collection days each week.

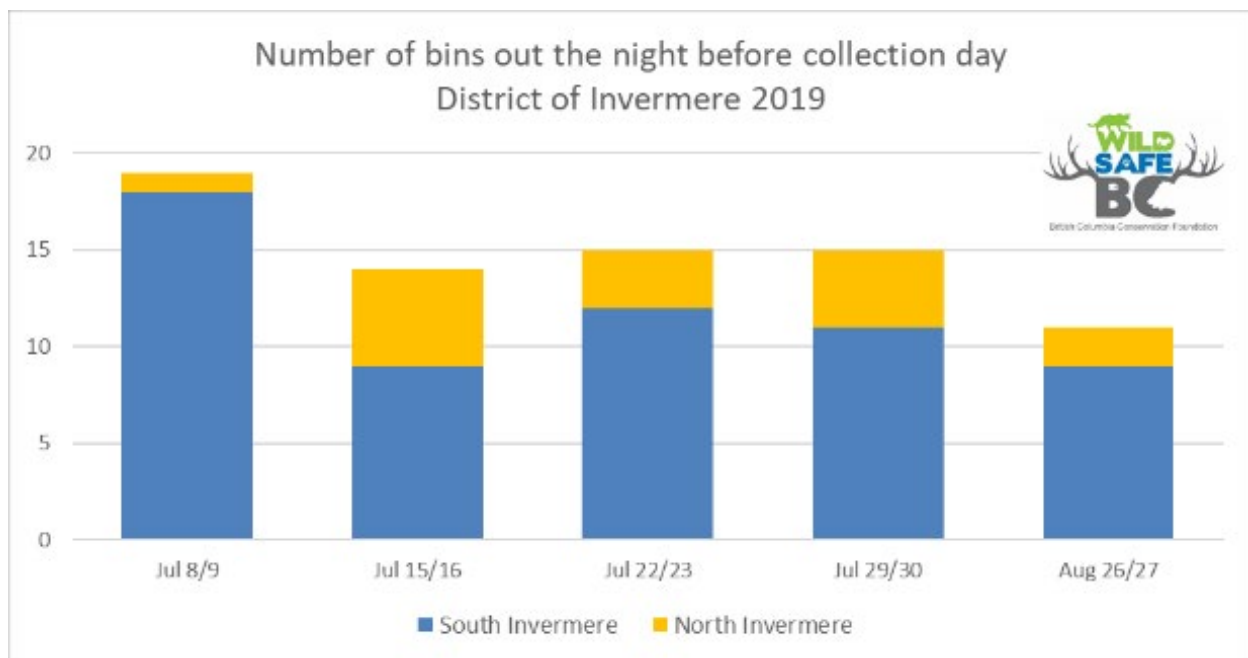


Figure 11. The number of garbage bins placed on the curb the night before collection day, within the District of Invermere, decreased after the educational bin tagging program began.

## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Columbia Valley FaceBook page grew 12% in 2019 from 547 to 617 page likes and had an overall reach of over 49,000. The most effective post engagements were those reporting wildlife sightings or activity in difference areas, plus a post about students at Martin Morigeau Elementary in Canal Flats graduating from the WildSafe Ranger program.

The WCC submitted two news articles to The Columbia Valley Pioneer (The Pioneer) concerning [wildlife safety and attractant management](#) and a reminder to not pick up lone [deer fawns](#). WSBC’s BC Goes Wild event held in Radium was featured on the [front page](#) (and page 4) of The Pioneer with a reminder about bear safety and keeping a clean campsite. Another article mentioned WSBC’s participation in the [Ursus and Us Bear Day event](#). The same edition



included a photo of the three local Conservation Officers and both local WCCs, captioned the [“Wildlife A-team”](#). Editions of The Pioneer are estimated to reach 6,400 people, in addition to an online following.

## Roadside Message Board

The roadside message board leading into Invermere (fig. 12) was used to display 3 different messages to thousands of residents and visitors driving by each day (Table 3).



Figure 12. Important message regarding bears and fruit trees displayed on the Welcome to Invermere roadside message board.

Table 3. Messages displayed on the Welcome to Invermere message board.

Message	Dates
Deer fawning season. Give space & leash pets.	May 27-June 1
Bear are in town. Pick your fruit trees! Call Groundswell for help.	Aug 25-31
Bears, s’mores & movie. WildSafeBC family event. Sept 7 2:30-5PM Radium Library	Sep 3-7

## Wildlife in Area Signs

“Aggressive Deer in Area” signs became available in 2019 which were very helpful in Invermere with the high volume of human-deer conflicts reported. The “Aggressive Deer in Area” signs and “Bear in Area” signs were installed at many different locations around town throughout the season. They were a highly visible reminder to the public to avoid approaching deer and follow

the noted precautions. A combination of 30 bear signs and 11 deer signs were installed in response to reports received through the WARP system and when community members made reports to the District of Invermere office. Unfortunately, six signs went missing from their locations in 2019.

## Collaborations

The WCC collaborated with Katrina Kellner, Director of Partnerships and Development at Groundswell Network Society (GNS) for another season of their Apple Rescue Program by helping spread the word about the program and its need for volunteers. In 2018, the WCC provided GNS a contact list of property owners with fruit trees which was used to focus on those who required help to pick their fruit; GNS used this list again in 2019 to connect with fruit tree owners. GNS promoted their program in the CV Pioneer, their website, Facebook page and using flyers. Katrina found it challenging to attract enough volunteers; however, the program managed to rescue 82 boxes of apples (nearly 2300 pounds) from 23 trees on 12 properties in 4 weeks. This fruit could have otherwise been left to rot and likely lead to human-bear conflict. The Apple Rescue program is very helpful to WSBC in Invermere because it gives the WCC an option to pass along to property owners to help them deal with this significant wildlife attractant.

In late August, the WCC and bylaw officer joined the COS to conduct a collaborative attractant review. The WCC chose the Fort Point neighborhood as it has had recurring attractant issues, mainly garbage and fruit trees. The group of four split into two teams and reached most homes in the area (see the results of the review in the Door-to Door Education section). While the audit was strictly educational with no orders issued by the COS, the WCC felt this collaborative effort emphasized the seriousness of proper attractant management. Again, the WCC supported the Columbia Valley Human-Wildlife Conflict Reduction Working Group, chaired by the COS Sergeant, which aims to connect communities in the Columbia Valley to discuss recent human-wildlife conflicts and work together to reduce current and future conflicts.

In late 2018, the COS donated to the WildSafeBC Invermere program a grizzly bear hide from a bear that had been destroyed after accessing attractants on individuals' properties. In 2019, the WCC displayed the hide at many events and presentations which drew attention and sparked positive conversation about the importance of managing attractants to stop the preventable destruction of bears.

## 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 conducted 3 bear spray workshops training 54 people. Positive feedback was received from attendees. To help off-set the cost of inert bear spray used during workshops, WSBC introduced a bear spray retailer sponsorship initiative.

## Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

Building on training provided in 2018, the WCC continued to learn about how to build relationships with Indigenous Peoples through a training webinar this year. Also, the WCC conducted research to learn more about the Secwépemc Nation.

## Special Initiatives

Following best fruit tree management practices, the District of Invermere's (DOI) public works department removed an unmanaged crabapple tree on DOI property (along Westside Road), as requested by the WCC and adjacent landowner. This area was being frequented by a black bear in 2019.

There are several apple trees on District property along 5<sup>th</sup> Street that should be considered for removal. There are mixed opinions from neighbouring residents about having these trees removed, therefore outreach and education to those residents could be undertaken regarding this matter.

## Challenges and Opportunities

In Invermere fruit trees continue to be a major wildlife attractant that draws wildlife into residential areas. Bears have been reported damaging fences and returning to 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. These areas are: Fort Point, Wilder, Westridge, 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the area north of the hospital. To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2020:

- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information (sent in May)
- Continued engagement with Groundswell Network Society to help expand their Apple Rescue Program
- Continue directing residents to the *Columbia Valley Fruit Exchange* Facebook group
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots
- Electric fence demonstration

Another consideration could be to discuss a tree exchange incentive program (replacing fruit-bearing for native, non-fruit bearing varieties) with the District to help entice property owners to replace their unwanted fruit trees.

Garbage stored outside also continues to be prevalent in Invermere. In 2020, the District will be using a new automated solid waste system with carts from Rehrig Pacific Company that are wildlife resistant. The program will include a newly implemented curbside organics pickup. An education campaign, similar to the one suggested to address fruit trees, should be implemented across the coverage area.



The *Draft Bear Hazard Assessment and Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan 2012* should be updated and work towards Bear Smart Community status continued.

Other opportunities to consider in 2020 could include:

- Having the DOI put WildSafeBC information and best practices on the Invermere website
- Using Jaybird Media to run educational advertisements on the TVs in local businesses and hotels.

## Acknowledgements

The WCC wishes to thank many people for their valuable contributions to the WildSafeBC Invermere program: Chris Prosser, CAO for the District of Invermere (DOI), COS Sgt. Drew Milne, CO Greg Kruger, CO Matt Hall, CO Kevin Mayowski, Bylaw officer Mark Topliff, Groundswell Network Society Director Katrina Kellner, Invermere Farmers and Artists Market organizers Ken Carlow and Marius Hoofd, Wildsight Branch President Baiba Morrow and Branch Manager Mandi McRobbie, photographer Pat Morrow, all DOI office staff and Public Works department, Southeast Disposal Manager Tyler and driver Trevor, Columbia Valley Pioneer Editor Lorene Keitch and reporter Dauna Ditson, volunteers Kaori Maruyama and Kim Kosik, WCC Jen Baker, and the BCCF team.