

WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Annual Report 2019

Executive Summary

In the fourth year of the WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Program, WildSafeBC continued to educate residents about preventing conflict with wildlife in the City of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, and the District of Peachland, thanks to funding from these partners. This was a challenging year for bear-human conflicts as it had the highest amount of black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) since 2016.

In response to the high bear activity, outreach activities were intensified. Through door-to-door education and garbage tagging, 225 and 325 people were reached respectively. Print, television and social media was also used to deliver bear-in-area alerts and messaging around attractant management. The Okanagan Westside Facebook page had a reach of over 35,000 and grew in page likes by 37% this year. Due to their popularity, an increased amount of bear spray demonstrations and workshops were offered, with 80 participants in total in 2019. Five other community presentations were provided, with over 100 participants. Eight community events were attended with a WildSafeBC display, attaining a reach over 800 people. The WildSafe Ranger Program was delivered to over 450 students, including 19 from the Sensisyston House of Learning who participated in the extended program. Thanks to additional funding provided by the Regional District of Central Okanagan, WildSafeBC programming was also delivered in the Central Okanagan West Electoral Area and at the Mission Creek Salmon Festival.

A main challenge continues to be responsible management of wildlife attractants on private property. This year, there were more requests by the public, COS, and bylaw for educational messaging on attractant management than there was the capacity to accommodate. In order to help grow the Okanagan Westside program and meet more of these requests, an increase in base funding is needed. A key opportunity for next year is to establish a stronger partnership with bylaw departments and work together to tackle attractant challenges in neighbourhoods. There is also an opportunity for the Okanagan Westside communities to start identifying and addressing the root causes of human-bear conflicts, by conducting a Bear Hazard Assessment. A Bear Hazard Assessment is the first step towards becoming certified as a Bear Smart Community. This is beyond the realm of the standard WildSafeBC program, but it is a project that could be done alongside it. Moving forward, these initiatives and partnerships will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

The complete 2019 annual report will be available in December on the WildSafeBC website at <https://wildsafebc.com/2019-reports/>. For additional information, please contact Meg Bjordal, WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Coordinator at 250-826-3114 or okwestside@wildsafebc.com.