



September 23, 2020

Mayor and Council
City of West Kelowna
2760 Cameron Rd
West Kelowna, BC
V1Z 2T6

Dear Mayor Milsom and City Council,

As the local WildSafeBC Community Coordinator, I am writing to alert you to the exceptionally high level of human-bear conflict that the city experienced this spring, and suggest some options for further supporting efforts to address and prevent these conflicts – making our community safer and keeping the bears in the wild. In the month of June alone this year, there were 150 reports regarding black bears made to the Conservation Officer Service, which is five times the average (Figure 1), in the WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Program area (West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, Peachland & Westside Rd area). The majority of these reports involved bears in the City of West Kelowna. The neighbourhoods of Rose Valley and Shannon Lake experienced the most human-bear conflicts, but bear sightings and conflicts occurred in many other neighbourhoods as well, including Lakeview Heights and Glenrosa. The high amount of local bear reports this spring is notable because the province as a whole only experienced an average level of reports, and because the fall (not the spring) is typically when we see the most reports in the area (Figure 1).

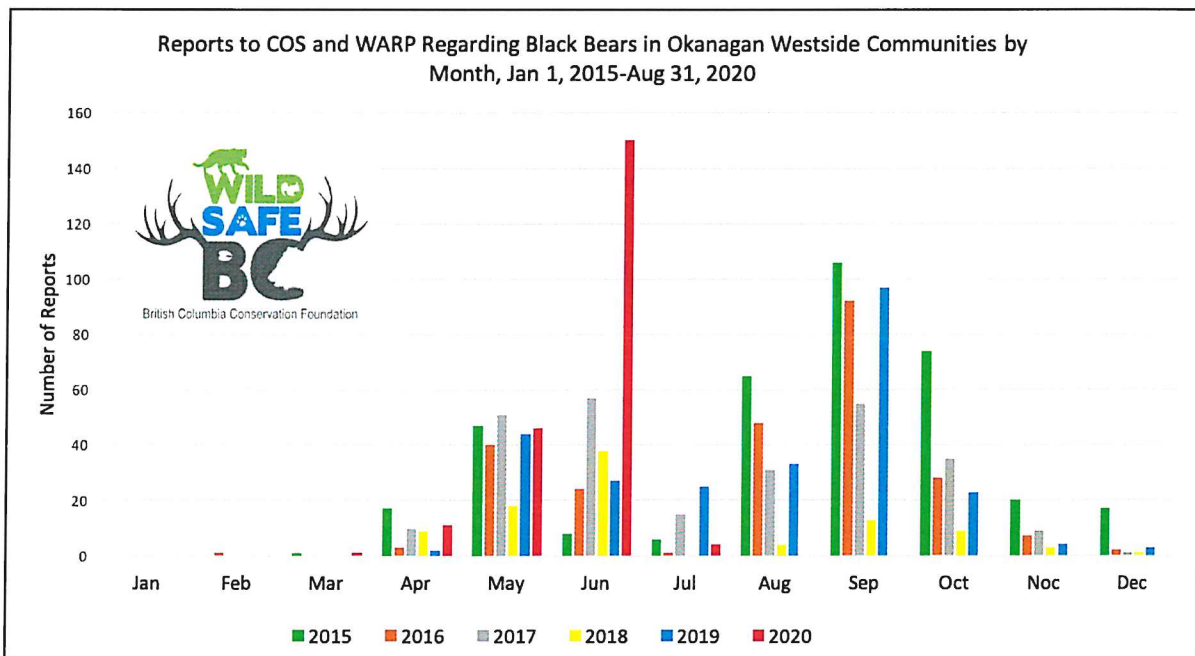


Figure 1: The number of reports by month, regarding black bears made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC’s Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) from January 1, 2015 to August 31, 2020.



About half of the black bear reports so far in 2020 (up to Aug 31st) involve food conditioned bears, and of the reports that identified attractants, garbage is noted in 77% of them. Given the high levels of human-bear conflict in the community this spring, it is difficult to predict what will occur during the course of this fall for bear conflict levels. Additionally, with the large amount of environmental uncertainty we face with climate change, combined with development and an expanding city, we may continue to see unusual patterns in levels of human-bear conflicts in the community.

Through my work as the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator, I am working hard to mitigate human-bear conflicts through various activities and actions, including: engaging with the public and utilizing media to raise awareness; providing direct education in high-conflict neighbourhoods; and collaborating with Conservation and Bylaw Officers, as well as program sponsors. However, my role does not allow for the more thorough assessment and long term planning that is needed. Thus, I urge the City of West Kelowna to consider undertaking steps in the *Bear Smart Community Criteria* in order to further prevent human-bear conflicts from occurring in the community. Other communities in the province that complete the criteria to become *Bear Smart* and address the root causes of human-bear conflicts, do see reductions in the amount of conflict, and the number of bears that have to be destroyed in their communities. This results in safer communities for everyone, bears and humans.

I have attached a factsheet to this letter that outlines the *Bear Smart Community Program*, including the criteria. The criteria are a series of 6 steps:

1. *Prepare a bear hazard assessment.*
2. *Prepare a bear/human conflict management plan.*
3. *Revise planning and decision making documents.*
4. *Implement a continuing education program.*
5. *Develop and maintain a bear proof waste management system.*
6. *Implement Bear Smart by-laws.*

By partnering with WildSafeBC, the City is already addressing step four. The first step in the criteria is to *Prepare a bear hazard assessment* (BHA), which is something I would be more than happy to discuss and advise on options for consideration. A BHA identifies high risk areas in the community for human-bear conflicts, which is essential information for planning and decision making on reducing conflicts in the community. While working through all the criteria is ideal, working on and achieving a few of the steps would have a positive impact. There is a great opportunity to work on step five in the criteria right now, *Develop and maintain a bear proof waste management system*. The Regional District is working on making bear-resistant garbage carts available to residents, but in order for those bins to be an effective solution, there also needs to be city bylaws that support proper use of the bins. It would also be beneficial to replace the open garbage cans at city parks, with bear-resistant ones. Given that garbage is the main attractant identified in the area, addressing this has potential to significantly reduce the human-bear conflict levels.



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Complex problems, like human-wildlife conflict, need complex solutions. The WildSafeBC program is a good start and the *Bear Smart Community Program and Criteria* provide an excellent framework to further address human-bear conflict in the community. Thank you for your attention to and consideration of this matter. Myself, and the resources available to me through WildSafeBC, are available to yourselves and city staff if you would like further information.

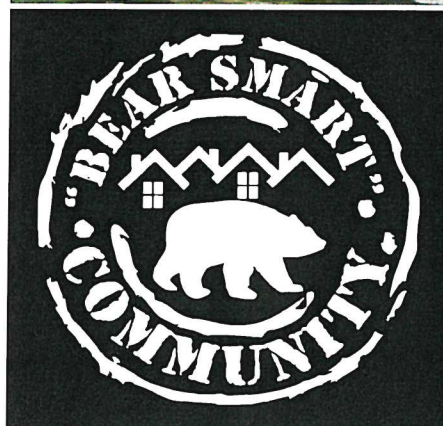
Regards,

Meg Bjordal, B.Sc., MSEM
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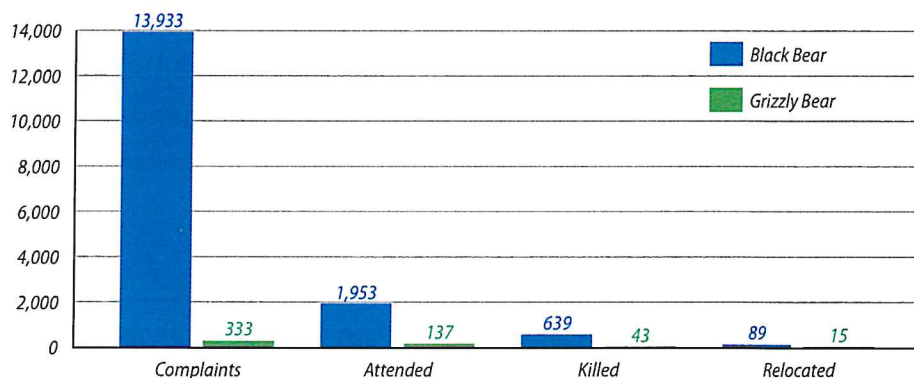
Bear Smart Communities

BRITISH COLUMBIA CONSERVATION OFFICER SERVICE

WHY IS THE BEAR SMART COMMUNITY PROGRAM IMPORTANT?

Every year, B.C.'s Conservation Officers respond to thousands of complaints regarding bears. Most of these conflicts begin when people allow bears to access non-natural food sources. Unfortunately, because there are few alternative control methods once bears have learned to access human food, Conservation Officers have no choice but to euthanize those bears.

10-Year Average of Bear Conflicts in British Columbia



ACCESS TO HUMAN FOOD

People teach bears bad habits. If bears are allowed to access human food and garbage, they quickly learn to associate it with people and become what is called food-conditioned. These bears also become habituated to people as they lose their fear of humans.

Habituated and food-conditioned bears learn to expect human food and are more likely to approach people, increasing risks to public safety, and are more difficult to drive away than wild bears.

WHAT IS THE BEAR SMART COMMUNITY PROGRAM?

The Bear Smart Community Program is a proactive conservation initiative that encourages efforts by communities, businesses and individuals to reduce human-bear conflicts.

It is a co-operative venture that recognizes the responsibility to manage bear-human conflicts rests with everyone and will require participation from the provincial government, municipal governments and local citizens to be effective.

It is community led, entirely voluntary on the part of the community, and acknowledges that each community will be unique in the conflicts that occur and the opportunities that exist to reduce those conflicts.

THE BEAR SMART VISION

- » Focus efforts on addressing the root causes of bear-human conflicts.
- » Reduce the overall number of conflicts.
- » Reduce the number of bears that have to be destroyed due to conflicts.



THE BENEFITS OF BEING "BEAR SMART"

The primary goal of the Bear Smart Community Program is to diminish the rate and intensity of human bear conflicts and thereby:

- » Improve public safety.
- » Reduce property damage.
- » Have fewer bears killed due to conflict.

THE BEAR SMART COMMUNITY PROGRAM IS BASED ON A SERIES OF ESTABLISHED CRITERIA:

1. Prepare a bear hazard assessment.

Review the history and pattern of bear conflicts in the community and identify high-use bear habitat, human-use areas (school yards, playgrounds, etc.) and non-natural attractants such as accessible garbage, fruit trees, bird feeders, compost, etc.

2. Prepare a bear/human conflict management plan.

Develop strategies to resolve the hazards identified and reduce the potential for human-bear conflicts.

3. Revise planning and decision making documents.

Ensure the community's commitment to the Bear Smart Community Program by incorporating Bear Smart practices into official community documents such as the Official Community Plan and/or Solid Waste Management Plans.

4. Implement a continuing education program.

Education is a key component of human-bear conflict reduction and the community must have an ongoing education program that is directed at all sectors of the community and consistent with the WildSafeBC/Ministry standard.

5. Develop and maintain a bear proof waste management system.

Ensure that all components of municipal waste management including waste, recycling and composting are managed appropriately and made inaccessible to bears. This may be done through bylaws, the use of bear-resistant containers and/or electric fencing.

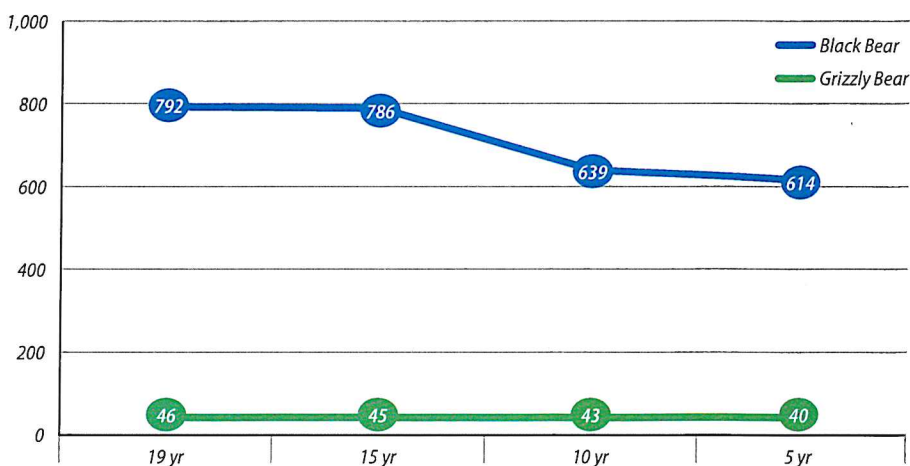
6. Implement Bear Smart by-laws.

Implement "Bear Smart" bylaws prohibiting the provision of food to bears as a result of intent, neglect, or irresponsible management of attractants. Implement a compliance strategy for these bylaws to ensure that there is full compliance with them.

BEAR SMART SUCCESSES

We have seen a steady decrease in the number of bears killed annually in response to conflict with people.

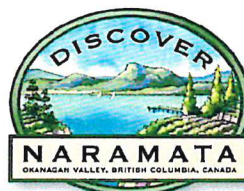
Average Number of Bears Killed Due to Conflict





More than 20 communities in B.C. are actively pursuing Bear Smart status.

Congratulations to eight communities that have successfully attained official Bear Smart status: Kamloops; Squamish; Lions Bay; Whistler; Port Alberni; Naramata; New Denver; and Coquitlam .



The Conservation Officer Service and the Province recognize there are challenges to the implementation of the Bear Smart Community Program and are committed to supporting and assisting with community efforts.

For more information regarding Bear Smart please visit us online or contact the Wildlife Conflict Manager.

Mike Badry, Wildlife Conflict Manager
Conservation Officer Service Branch
Phone: (778) 698-4276
Email: mike.badry@gov.bc.ca

Bear Smart Community Program:
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/wildlife/human-wildlife-conflict/staying-safe-around-wildlife/bears/bear-smart>

R.A.P.P.
Report All Poachers and Polluters

Conservation Officer 24 Hour Hotline
1-877-952-RAPP (7227)
Cellular Dial: #7277



Website:
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