

WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Annual Report 2020

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the activities of the WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Program between May 1st and November 30th 2020. This WildSafeBC program area includes the communities of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, Peachland, and the Central Okanagan West Electoral Area. We acknowledge this land as the unceded traditional territories of the syilx/Okanagan peoples. This year, black bears continued to be the most reported species to the Conservation Officer Service, with a total of 227 reports (Jan 1-Oct 31, 2020), followed by deer and then coyotes. Unusually this year, the bear conflict peaked in the spring rather than the fall, with 154 reports in June, which is four times the monthly average of the previous four years.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activities with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community. Following COVID-19 safety precautions, several of the standard WildSafeBC program activities were modified to ensure physical distancing and other safety measures were in place. The WildSafe Ranger Program was delivered to over 115 students from three different schools and one Girl Guide group, through webinars and outdoor activities. WildSafeBC BC Goes Wild Events provided three wildlife safety themed events, including a bear spray demo, and altogether had 65 attendees. For the family friendly BC Goes Wild Events, the WCC collaborated with Sncēwips Heritage Museum to make videos that shared knowledge about bears and syilx/Okanagan peoples culture. Through door-to-door education and garbage tagging, 230 and 405 homes, respectively, were directly provided messaging on attractant management. Print, television and social media was also used to deliver bear-in-area alerts, and messaging about local wildlife and attractant management. The Okanagan Westside Facebook page had a large reach and grew in page likes by 69%. Five different strata communities were collaborated with this season, and over 225 households received letters on attractant management from the WCC. The WCC invested time this season in supporting Bear Smart initiatives, and identifying opportunities within the Bear Smart Criteria for program sponsors to consider further actions on, in order to further address and prevent human-wildlife conflicts.

Thank you to the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the City of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, the District of Peachland, and the Regional District of Central Okanagan for funding and supporting the program; as well as, all the program volunteers and collaborators. Challenges around attractant management, especially in relation to



garbage, continue in Okanagan Westside communities. To address this, the WCC will continue WildSafeBC outreach activities and support program sponsors in implementing Bear Smart criteria. The WCC recommends that the City of West Kelowna considers conducting a Bear Hazard Assessment to identify high risk areas in the community for human-bear conflicts. This is the first step in the Bear Smart Community Criteria and is essential information for planning and decision making on reducing conflicts in the community. Moving forward, these initiatives and partnerships will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

The complete 2020 annual report will be available in December on the WildSafeBC website at <https://wildsafebc.com/resources/community-reports/>. For additional information, please contact Meg Bjordal, WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Coordinator at 250-826-3114 or okwestside@wildsafebc.com.