

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2021

Okanagan Westside

Prepared by: Meg Bjordal

WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Coordinator



Executive Summary

This report summarizes the activities of the WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Program between May 1 and December 10, 2021. This WildSafeBC program area includes the communities of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, Peachland, and the Central Okanagan West Electoral Area (Figure 1). We acknowledge this land as the unceded traditional territories of the syilx/Okanagan peoples.

This year, January 1 to November 20, black bears not only continued to be the most reported species to the Conservation Officer Service, but report numbers are nearly double the average with a total of 412 reports. This exceptionally high level of bear activity is believed to be due to drought conditions that reduced the natural food availability, as well as nearby wildfires, which resulted in increased bear movements to adjacent habitats. Deer were the next most reported species with 227 reports this year, which is double the average, and they continue to show an increasing trend over the last six 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 proper sanitization and physical distancing measures were in place. The following summarizes key program deliverables over the course of the season:

- 14 WRP webinar, outdoor and classroom presentations, and 281 youth reached
- One presentation given to a community group and 12 participants
- 30 people reached through door-to-door in person and 93 door hangers left
- There were seven bin tagging routes and 205 bins tagged in West Kelowna and Peachland; 83% of the residences whose bins were tagged during the initial survey were not found on the curb again during the second survey
- There were three bin tagging routes and 72 homes sent educational letters in Westbank First Nation
- There was one display booth and 80 people reached
- There were over 85 Facebook posts (excluding posts shared from provincial page) and 189 new Facebook page followers from January 1 to October 27, 2021

The WCC collaborated with three different strata/community association communities to provide information to residents on specific bear activity and relevant attractant management information. As well, the WCC continues to identify and communicate opportunities and recommendations for Bear Smart initiatives, such as wildlife attractant bylaws, to program sponsors in order to address and prevent human-wildlife conflicts.

Thank you to the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, Province of BC, City of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, District of Peachland, and the Regional District of Central Okanagan for funding and supporting the program. The WCC sincerely appreciates the commitment of program volunteers and collaborators. Challenges around attractant

management, especially in relation to garbage and fruit trees, continue in Okanagan Westside communities. To address this, the WCC will continue WildSafeBC outreach activities and support program sponsors in implementing Bear Smart criteria. Moving forward, these initiatives and partnerships will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

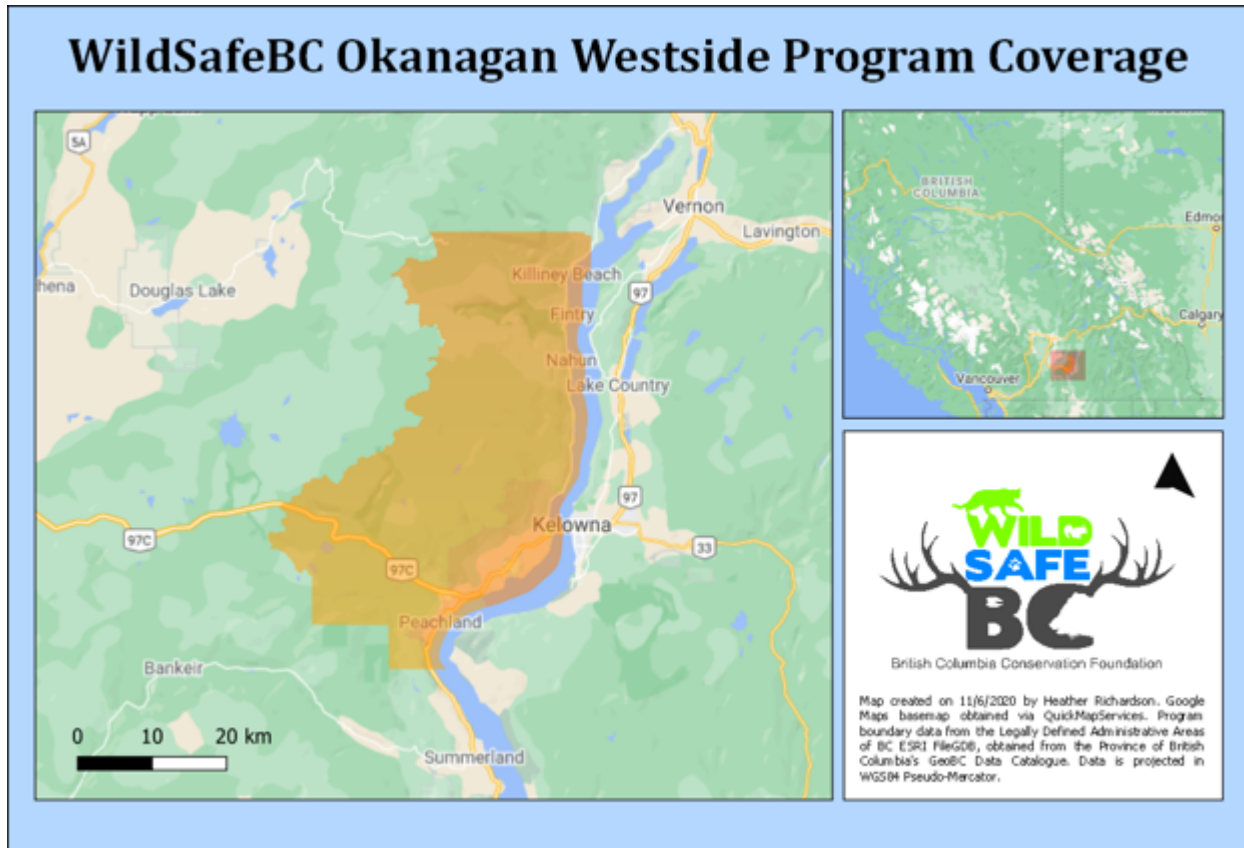


Figure 1: WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside program coverage – West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, Peachland, Central Okanagan West Electoral Area.

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Cover Photo: Meg Bjordal, WildSafeBC Community Coordinator giving a WildSafe Rangers presentation via storyboard to a Kindergarten class. Photo Credit: Shayna Hvala

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 report for Okanagan Westside includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 20, 2021. Black bears continue to be the most reported species in Okanagan Westside communities, with 412 reports in 2021 (Figure 2). They are followed by 227 deer reports. Coyotes and cougars were the distant third and fourth reported species, with 23 and 16 reports respectively.

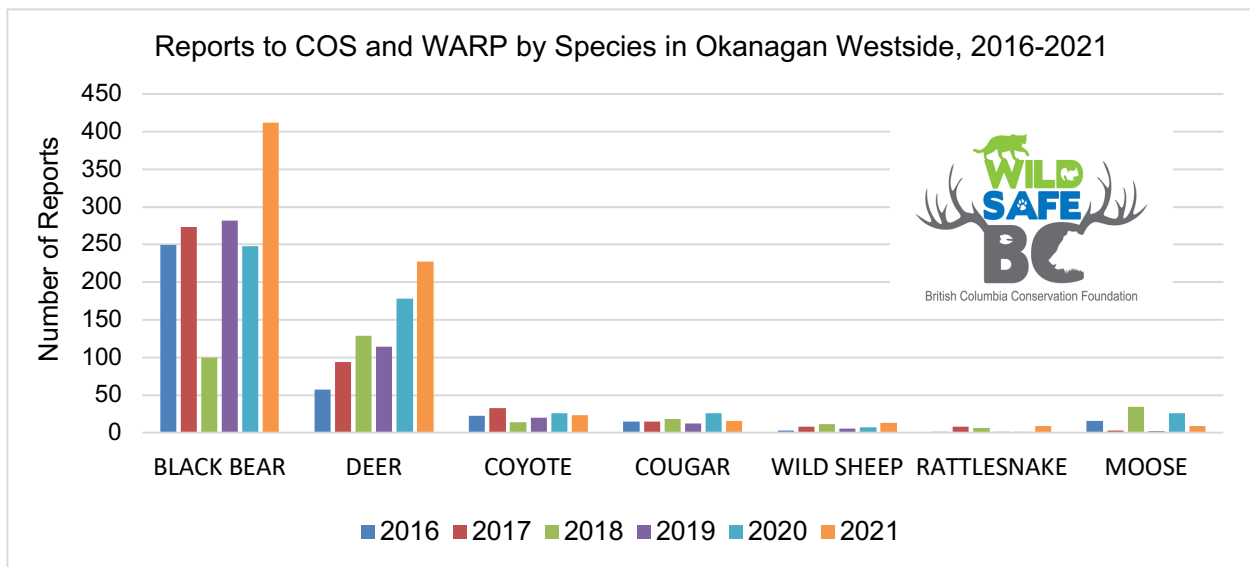


Figure 2. Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) in Okanagan Westside communities from January 1, 2016 to November 20, 2021.

This year had a considerable increase in the amount of black bear reports at 1.8 times the annual average from 2016-2020 of 231 reports. The increase in black bear reports this year is likely due to a combination of drought conditions that reduced natural food availability and nearby wildfires that resulted in bears needing to move to adjacent habitats. In August, when the area had two active wildfires in close proximity, there were 111 black bear reports (Figure 3). When compared to the monthly average from 2016-2020 of 31 reports, this is an increase of 358%. Similarly, September, October and November (up to Nov 20th for 2021 reports) were far above average with increases in black bear reports by 236%, 205% and 179%, respectively. While it is normal to see an increase in black bear reports during the fall as bears are increasing their foraging to prepare for winter denning, the substantial increase this year over the previous five years suggests exceptional circumstances. With the uncertainty in future environmental conditions due to climate change, there may continue to be increases in human-bear conflicts locally.

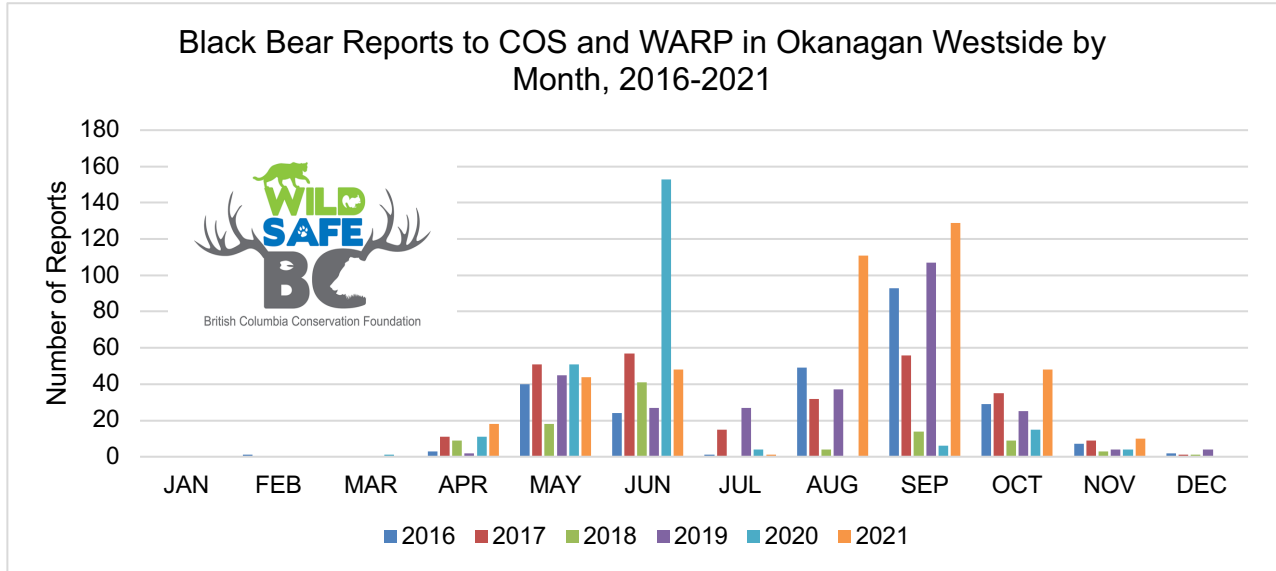


Figure 3. Black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) in Okanagan Westside communities by month from January 1 – November 20, 2021.

A contributing factor in human-bear conflicts is the presence and availability of attractants. While climate conditions cannot be controlled, management of attractants can. Garbage continues to be the primary attractant in Okanagan Westside communities (Figure 4). Measures like wildlife attractant bylaws, that address and reduce the prevalence of unsecured garbage are essential in order to prevent high levels of human-bear conflicts in Okanagan Westside communities.

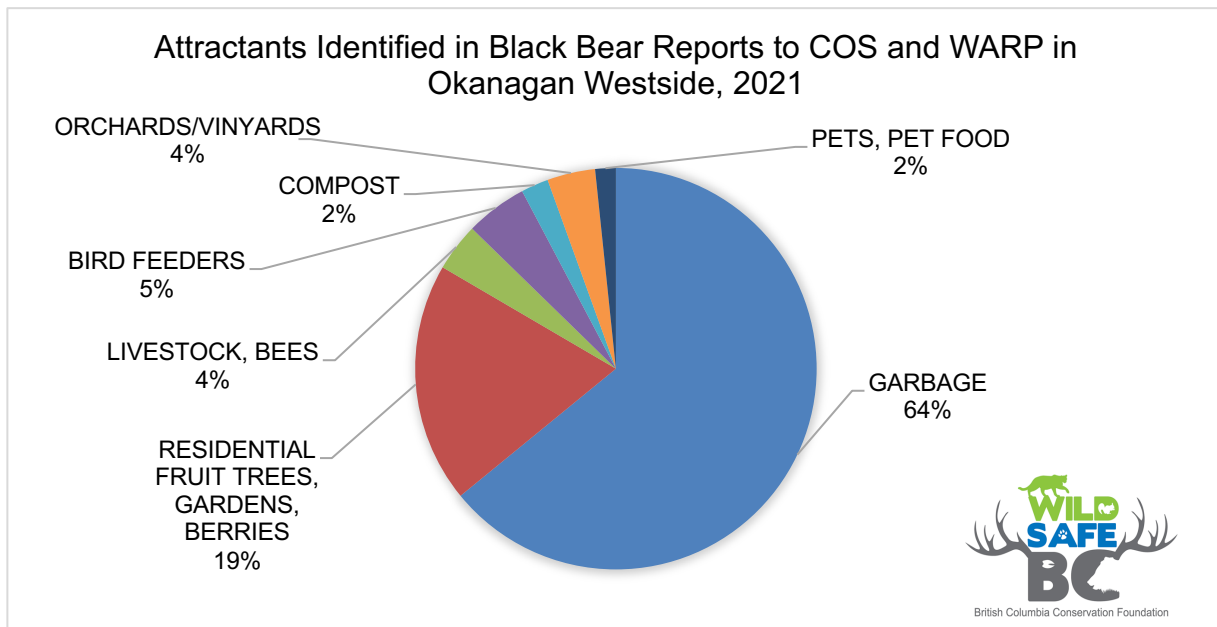


Figure 4. Attractants and their relative proportions identified in black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) in the Okanagan Westside from January 1 – November 20, 2021.

Deer reports are seeing an increasing trend in Okanagan Westside communities (Figure 2), with this year having double the annual average of 114 reports from 2016-2020. Human-deer conflicts can include damage to residential gardens, vehicle collisions, and encounters with aggressive or defensive deer, particularly during fawning season and when people have dogs with them. The vast majority of deer reports made this year (88%) are regarding injured/distressed or dead deer. Major risks to deer in urban areas include vehicle collisions and impalement or entanglement on fencing.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of five schools participated in the WRP through classroom, webinar and outdoor presentations this year, and 281 students became WildSafe Rangers (Table 1). A total of 86 students received WildSafe Ranger Kits, and 129 other students received partial WildSafe Ranger kits which included colouring/activity books, bookmarks and brochures.

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

School	Grade	Students
Glenrosa Elementary	3 and 4	21
Mar Jok Elementary	3	66
Peachland Elementary	K, 1, 2, 3, 4	129
sensisyustən House of Learning	2 and 3	13
Shannon Lake Elementary	K	52

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave a webinar presentation to the Mar Jok PAC on local bear activity and attractant management best practices. There were 12 participants.

Display Booths

This year the WCC attended the Welcome the Kokanee event hosted by the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) at Hardy Falls Regional Park on August 28th. The WildSafeBC booth display included the popular poops n'prints game, where public match wildlife scat and prints to the relevant animals (Figure 5). This event reached about 80 people.



Figure 5. The poops n'prints game at the WildSafeBC booth.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

In light of COVID-19, door-to-door education was again modified this year to largely consist of leaving door hangers and letters speaking to the human-wildlife conflict occurring in the neighbourhood. Through door-to-door education, 93 households were reached with door hangers, and over 30 people were further reached during in-person conversations. The Rose Valley area in West Kelowna, the Community Core in Westbank First Nation (WFN), and Westshore Estates in the Central Okanagan West Electoral Area were prioritized for this outreach activity due to a high level of wildlife activity. Additionally, a further 48 homes in West Kelowna’s Lakeview Heights neighbourhood and 27 homes in Westshore Estates were reached through door-door education as part of the WildSafeBC Central Okanagan program.

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. With seven distinct routes, and three repeated, a total of 205 bins were tagged (Figure 6). The Lakeview Heights route was done in collaboration with the Central Okanagan program. Only 13 of the bins tagged on repeated routes, had to be stickered twice. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours is demonstrated by the 83% of the residences whose bins were tagged during the initial survey and then were not found on the curb again during the second survey, as well as the overall reduction in bins on second passes (Figure 6). New this season, the WCC partnered with the City of West Kelowna Bylaw Department, who sent educational letters to all West Kelowna homes observed on first passes to have placed garbage bins out early. These letters appeared to be very effective in helping to reduce the number of bins that needed to be tagged a second time.

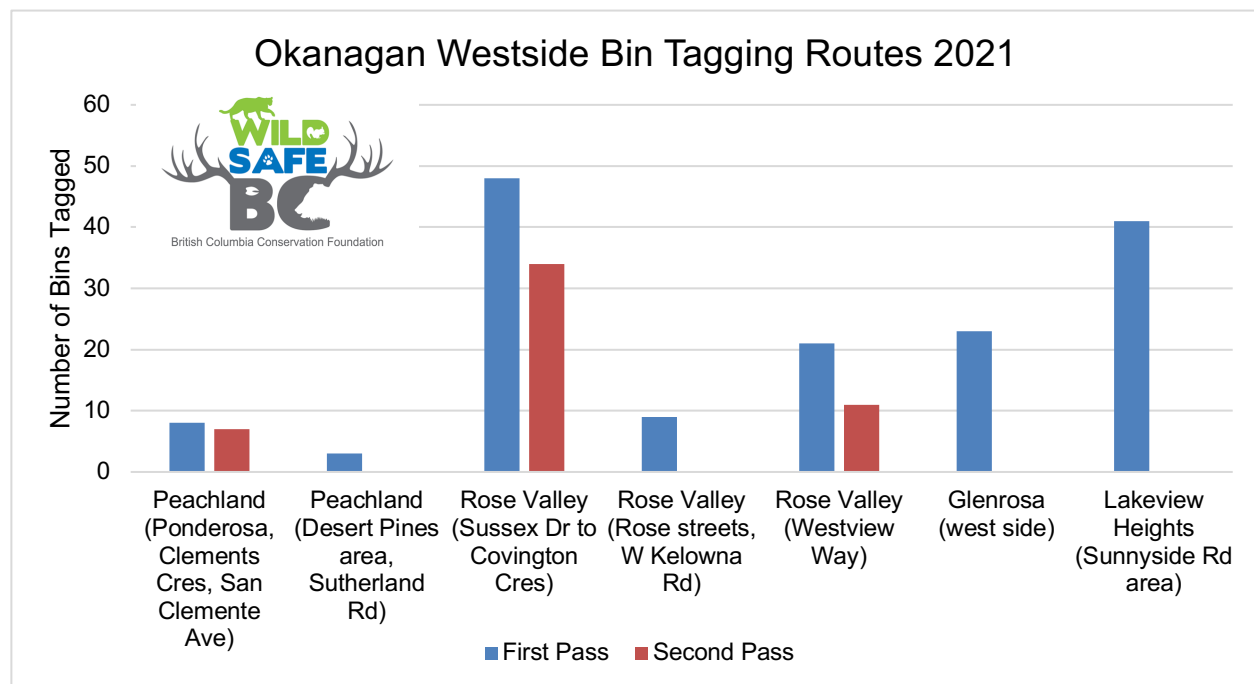


Figure 6. Routes and numbers of garbage bins tagged as part of the 2021 WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Program.

Additionally, during three routes in WFN, a further 72 homes were observed by the WCC to have placed garbage out early for collection. Some of these residences place garbage bags, rather than bins curbside, so as an adaptation to WildSafeBC's bin tagging activity and in partnership with WFN, instead of using stickers to deliver the educational messaging, these homeowners were mailed an educational letter and WildSafeBC brochures by WFN.

Social Media and Press

For 2021, the Okanagan Westside Facebook page name was changed to "WildSafeBC Central Okanagan", and management of the page was shared with the WildSafeBC Central Okanagan program. The page grew 32% in 2021 from 583 to 772 page followers by the end of October. The page had an excellent reach of over 40,000 people with more than 85 original posts created. The posts with the highest reach were the ones alerting residents to wildlife in neighbourhoods. The reach on these posts was especially large when the WCC worked with partner organizations, including the City of West Kelowna and WFN, to share the posts to their pages. The six posts shared by West Kelowna had a reach of over 6,200 with over 600 engagements.

Monitoring of community Facebook pages for neighbourhoods within the program area provided valuable insight on wildlife activity within the neighbourhoods, as activity would often be reported here and not to the COS. Pictures and videos of bears posted to social media also assisted to provide valuable information about the bears in the community including location, behaviours and number of individuals. These community pages were also good locations to share posts from the Central Okanagan page to reach more people, and provided an opportunity to address situations in specific neighbourhoods when necessary.

Municipal newsletters were utilized for WildSafeBC messaging. WildSafeBC articles were included in the monthly WFN membership newsletters, sent to around 800 people. To assist with alerting residents during times of high bear activity, and providing relevant education on attractant management, two Email-Notification WildSafeBC articles were sent via the City of West Kelowna and one via WFN. The first WildSafeBC West Kelowna E-Notification was received by 2,985 accounts, and opened by 1,528; the second was received by 3,175 and opened by 1,702. The WFN Email-Notification system is new, and this article was sent to around 50 subscribers.

The WCC was interviewed for several traditional print, online, radio and television news stories (Appendix, Table 2). These stories raised awareness of the challenges with human-wildlife conflict in the area, especially the unusually high amount of bear activity that occurred this fall. They were also an excellent tool to deliver information on attractant management and the importance of it, to a large number of people.

Wildlife in Area Signs

The WCC worked closely with program sponsors to deploy wildlife in area signage, particularly in relation to bears. When bears were confirmed (usually through multiple sightings) to be

frequenting a particular area, the WCC requested that the program sponsor place signage in the area to alert residents of the bear and remind them to secure garbage (e.g. Figure 7).



Figure 7. A West Kelowna bear-in-area sign, in an area the WCC was bin tagging.

Collaborations

The WCC continued to support strata's or community associations who were interested in taking steps to address and prevent human-wildlife conflicts. This season the WCC worked with a mobile home park, a community association, and a strata to provide information on specific bear activity and relevant attractant management information.

Special Initiatives

The WCC continues to identify and communicate opportunities and recommendations for Bear Smart initiatives to program sponsors. Utilizing the framework of the [Bear Smart Community criteria](#) can result in a reduction of human-bear conflicts in the community, by addressing the root causes of these conflicts. The WCC recommends for Peachland and West Kelowna to consider conducting a Bear Hazard Assessment (BHA), and implementing wildlife attractant bylaws; as well as, continuing to support the Regional District's work to make bear-resistant garbage carts available for residents. The WCC will continue to assist WFNs commendable plans and efforts to work through the Bear Smart criteria.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges around attractant management, especially in relation to garbage, continues for Okanagan Westside communities. Continuation of core WildSafeBC activities, such as door-to-door-education, bin tagging, use of media, and partnerships with program sponsors on wildlife in area signage and communications are essential to address this. Additional actions from program sponsors will be key to making substantial changes in the amount of human-wildlife

conflicts in these communities. Aware residents continue to share their frustrations and concerns with the WCC around human-bear conflicts in their neighbourhoods, and their desire to have bear-resistant garbage carts and municipal bylaws around attractant management. The WCC should continue to provide support and recommendations for program sponsors interested in further actions to address human wildlife conflicts, which will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

Besides garbage, residential fruit trees are a notable attractant, and likely underreported due to the misperception that this is a natural food that does not harm bears. However, fruit trees lead to bears becoming habituated to people and rewarded for spending time in communities foraging. When the fruit wanes, bears will turn to other food sources which often leads to escalating destructive behaviour, human safety concerns, and the lethal removal of that bear. Electric fencing is one solution to manage fruit trees in a way to prevent wildlife conflicts, and the WCC did plan an electric fencing workshop this season, though unfortunately it had to be cancelled due to lack of registrations. Despite this, one should be offered again next year and different strategies for promotion of the workshop should be considered. Additionally, continuing media efforts and conversations with the public around electric fencing and fruit trees should be continued.

If time allows, other opportunities for next season include launching the new WildSafeBC initiatives such as the Bare Campsite Program and the Business Pledge. The Bare Campsite Program provides clear guidelines and resources to assist campground operators in maintaining a safe campsite for both people and wildlife. 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. 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.

Acknowledgements

The WCC is grateful for the generous support the WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Program receives from its funders including the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the Province of BC, the City of West Kelowna, the WFN, the District of Peachland and the RDCO. Thank you to the staff within the sponsor organizations who assisted with program support and information sharing.

Thank you to all the Conservation Officers of the South and North Okanagan Zones for their communications and collaboration, especially CO Murdock. The WCC also thanks the BCCF team for their guidance and help throughout the season. Finally, a special thanks goes to out to our dedicated program volunteer Ann Graham.

Appendix

Table 2. Media stories and interviews involving the WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside program in 2021.

Date	Media Outlet	Type	Title (click link to read full article)
Jan 14	Info News	news article	2020 West Kelowna deer reports increase, record number of springtime bears tallied by WildSafeB.C.
April 27	Castanet	news article	Alert issued about bear roaming Peachland
April 28	Peachland View	news article	Bear in Area Alert
April 28	West K News	news article	WildSafeBC expands service into Kelowna, Lake Country
May 6	West K News	news article	Bear alert issued for West Kelowna's Rose Valley Neighbourhood
May 6	Castanet	news article	Habituated bear roaming
May 7	CHBC Global	TV & news article	Bear alert in effect for West Kelowna's Rose Valley neighbourhood
May 17	West K news	news article	WildSafeBC reminds residents to manage attractants as bears spotted in Okanagan
June 1	AM1150	news article	Bear Activity in West Kelowna
Aug 19	Kelowna Capitol News	news article	Fires and drought increase bear activity in Central Okanagan as fall season comes
Aug 28	Info News	news article	Fall bear encounters arrive three weeks early thanks to Interior drought
Aug	Westside Weekly	news article	Bears
Aug 29	CHBC Global	TV	Bear Activity
Sept 13	AM1150	radio & news article	Exceptional level of bear activity
Sept 14	CHBC Global	TV	Bear sightings on the rise in Central Okanagan
Oct 28	Kelowna Capitol News	news article	Food-conditioned bears still active in West Kelowna neighbourhoods: WildsafeBC