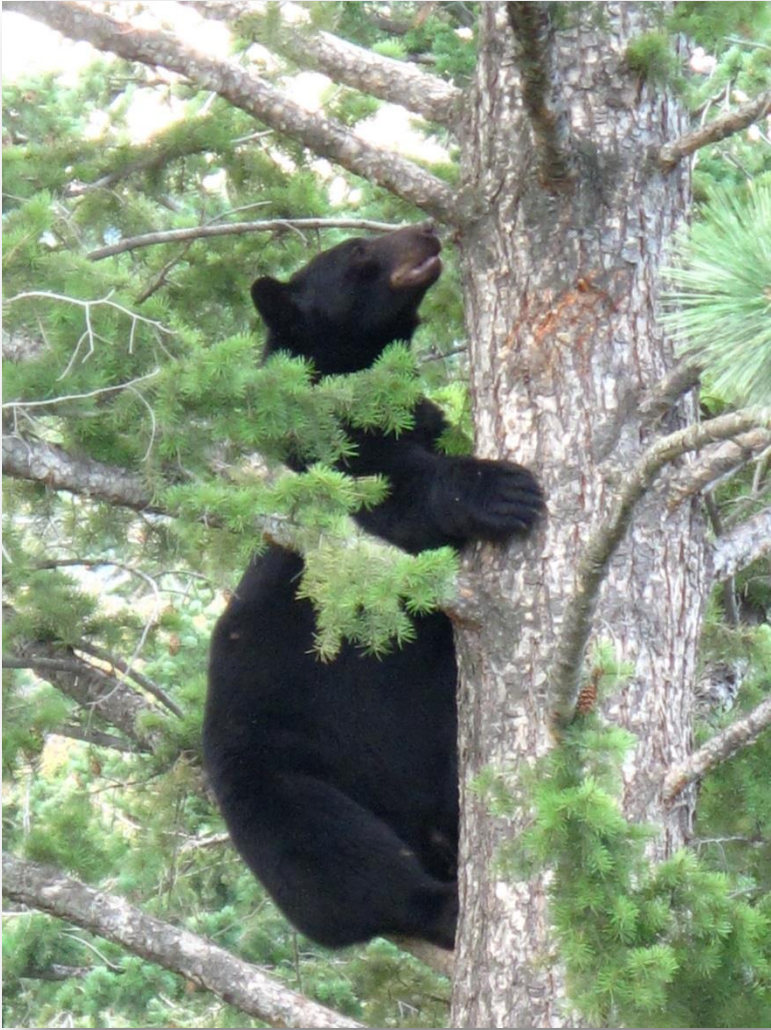


WildSafeBC Year End Report 2015

Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen

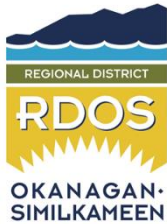
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Executive Summary

The 2015 season began quietly for bear activity in the region. Calls were down significantly until fire season in mid-July. Bears and other wildlife became displaced by fire and disoriented by the thick valley wide smoke. Bears were getting into hot tubs and ponds, and seen in places they do not normally roam. Beginning in late July, the CO Service got very busy responding to wildlife issues inside and outside the RDOS (outside communities of West Kelowna, Kelowna and Peachland) and in the fire zones Oliver to Osoyoos. As fall approached, three bears (sow and two cubs) were destroyed near a school in downtown Penticton and other bears have been seen within City limits. Also, cougar sightings are up this year.

Naramata celebrated its first anniversary of being Bear Smart - June 23rd 2015. A small first anniversary cake cutting and celebration was held at the community farmer's market.

This year the program's focus turned to the next 'hot spots' in the region; Princeton and Summerland. They have both been long standing hot spots for human-bear conflict and wildlife issues. Last fall Summerland was identified for a concentrated garbage audit and tagging education program that provided some good data to engage Summerland council this year. Summerland will receive wildlife education to elementary schools this fall

For the first time, the RDOS employed a Canada Summer Jobs Student to assist with outreach in the 2015 season. Ahbi Sharma from Oliver was hired in June, trained by the BC Conservation Foundation and worked throughout the region until August 30th.

Figure 1 Naramata - First Year Anniversary celebration June 23rd



Area E Director Karla Kozakevich, CO Inspector Barb Leslie, and WSCC Zoë Kirk cut the cake

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Highlights from the 2015 Season

The highlight of the program was the continuing expansion of the WildSafeBC program. This year saw the addition of a summer student and more social media opportunities.

Media

A newly transplanted newsman from Toronto area was a terrific advocate in putting WildSafeBC in the news on radio throughout the Valley weekly if not twice weekly. Jon Szekeres of AM800 EZ Rock and SunFM 97 was keen to learn about his new area. He found it quite overwhelming, trying to grasp how to co-exist with the variety of wildlife in around urban populations in the RDOS. His newness added enthusiasm and inquisitiveness to his news stories. The net result was a big increase in our overall profile and social media posts got broader reach and recognition. He took every opportunity to interview the WSCC and always mentioned attractant management, the ways to best reduce risk, co-exist and how to react to human-wildlife conflicts.

Canada Summer Jobs Student – Abhi Sharma

In late May, Abhi Sharma was hired as a WildSafeBC summer student. After receiving his training at Kamloops he started working in the RDOS/ Princeton area. Due to time and distance, Princeton added additional funding to offset mileage and some wages. Abhi conducted outreach through regular market and event booths, door-to-door canvassing in hot spot areas and a week-end long booth at the popular Fall Fair.

Figure 2 – Outreach activities



Princeton

Princeton, at the far western edge of the region was a high priority for a more direct campaign for 2015. The geography and proximity to wilderness areas attracts bears and other predators (along with urban deer – who find safe harbour) into the community. Elementary Schools in Princeton received educational presentations in April of 2015. Princeton was the primary beneficiary of an RDOS WildSafeBC summer student; Abhi Sharma. He attended many local events including regular Farmer’s Markets engaging the public in outreach education. He also conducted door-to-door campaigns in hot spot neighbourhoods. In closing out the summer he produced a short Bear Hazard Assessment for Princeton, which the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator will be adding to over the winter and spring of 2016.

Summerland

Summerland continues to be a secondary hot spot location. Mayor Waterman requested a meeting between WSBC and other stakeholders after the CO Service and WSCC presented on local human-wildlife and garbage issues to the new Summerland Council. As a result, more information is being sent to homeowners, and an internal discussion regarding bylaw amendments are beginning to take shape. Zoe has been in contact with staff representatives to assist in furthering the educational outreach component. The WSCC is trying to schedule school presentations later this fall to all Summerland Elementary Schools.

Presentations

Presentations were updated and honed for a wide range of audiences this season; to provide insight into the reasons human-wildlife conflict occurs and what we can do to reduce it. Presentations were given to kindergarten children through to mature adults. Specific presentations and training were provided to agricultural sectors including multi-cultural agricultural workers. RDOS WildSafeBC provided presentations (or demonstrations) to the following total audience of 642 people this season:

- Penticton Girl Guides – April (Zoe)
- Osoyoos Home Owner’s Assoc – July (Abhi)
- Pacific Agra Research Station – training 50 staff including BC Wine Grape Council members - May (Zoe/Marg Holm)
- Princeton Schools: John Allyson and Vermillion Forks (Zoe)
- Vermillion Forks Naturalists Society – April (Zoe)
- Staff Training – RDOS (outside workers) May (Zoe)
- Museum of Penticton – Wild Camp - July (Abhi)
- Osoyoos Library presentation – July
- Oliver Sun Fun Day Camps – July 2 (Abhi)
- BC Wine Grape Council Conference – July 21/22 - bear safety training (Zoe)
- Oliver Young Naturalists – Aug
- Summerland - Composting in Bear Country – Mar/ April (Zoe)
- South Okanagan Youth Naturalists - Nov

Figure 3.
Display
examples



Displays

Educational displays at local events prove to be an effective part of the program’s delivery. The display is continuously being updated with materials and was once again a big hit with the public. It is always was a great place to begin a discussion on local wildlife issues with residents. People share their stories and are able to access information and solutions for their own attractant management challenges.

WildSafeBC spent 23 days and interacted with 1,112 people at the following local events:

- Princeton Farmer’s Markets - 6 (Abhi)
- Summerland Farmer’s Markets – 3 (Abhi)
- Hedley Farmer’s Market – 1 (Abhi)
- Oliver Market – 2 July/Aug (Abhi)
- Canada Day Morning – Summerland (Abhi)
- Canada Afternoon – Naramata (Abhi)
- BC Wine Grape Council Conference – July (2 days) (Abhi and Zoe)
- Princeton – New Beginnings – June (Abhi)
- Penticton Farmer’s Market – Aug (1) (Abhi)
- Naramata Market – 2 (Abhi)
- Naramata Market Bear Smart Anniversary (Abhi /Zoe)
- Princeton Fall Fair – Sept – 2 (Abhi)

Figure 4 Princeton Presentations: WSSC Zoe Kirk demonstrating ‘whoa bear’ with school participation at Vermillion Forks Elementary and RDOS staffer Cam Baughen’s talking on Staying Safe and Composting in Bear Country at Vermillion Forks NC



Urban Deer: Forums/Focus meetings

The deer issue was/is an important component of the WSCC hours remaining in the budget. Many different groups (Gov't and NGO's) throughout the Province have been lobbying the Provincial Government for attention to dealing with this matter, and the RDOS has been kept in the loop via the Provincial Coordinator of WildSafeBC, Frank Ritcey and the BC Conservation Officer Service. The RDOS WSCC organizes and facilitates the regional deer meetings.

A committee meeting was held early in the year, Jan 20th 2015, at the RDOS offices. This brought together representatives from across the regional district in all levels of Gov't and beyond to Kamloops, Kelowna and as far as grand Forks. Issues of 'ownership' of urban deer, fence line carnage along the highways, First Nations requirements, and the ability for Penticton to relax bylaws to allow for limited access hunting on rural properties (for deer in season) were discussed.

A second deer meeting was organized and facilitated by the Town of Princeton as a 'town hall' open panel session on March 31st, 2015. Frank Ritcey and WSCC Zoe Kirk attended this very well presented panel discussion with just under 100 Princeton residents and interested parties. This was an excellent example of community engagement; what the issues with deer are, and what is available to help resolve the issue.

The next deer meeting will be on Oct 21st, 2015 at the Penticton Ministry of Environment offices. The Provincial Gov't has announced some funding and expanded roles of the Provincial deer committee. The committee will discuss ways to continue moving forward and attract some of the eligible monies from the Province.

Figure 5 WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator Frank Ritcey addressing the audience; Princeton Town Hall meeting Mar 31st



Challenges of the 2015 Season

The additional summer student both helped and hindered the program in 2015. It was cost effective to have Abhi to take the burden of weekend events off the shoulders of the WSCC schedule but added supervisory and organizational hours to oversee the student's outreach initiatives.

Program duration constraints were a bit less of a challenge this season, due to banking of hours from one year to the next, to start the date of the program which proved helpful. While the usual program begins June, many bears are already awake and have been active since March. A consistent earlier start date helps the program deliver information when bears and wildlife are beginning to be active and adds preparation and booking time before the start of the season.

The biggest challenge was the hot, dry, fire season on the South Okanagan in 2015. Wildlife was erratic and displaced. This caused a large increase in the volume and resulting phone time required to talk with residents than any other incident or year to date and more media exposure.

Goals for 2016

Looking forward to the 2016 season, RDOS WildSafeBC hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to 'Keep wildlife wild and communities safe'.

- Work more with Summerland to address bylaw revision to restrict residents from placing garbage to the curb early
- Continue with Princeton to broaden educational campaigns and encourage attractant management
- Work towards the community of Kaleden in Electoral Area D becoming Bear Smart
- Continue to build upon existing agricultural based partnerships and forge new relationships with the goal of making WildSafeBC a familiar and integral part of the wildlife conflict solution
- Continue to assist with the Urban deer issue
- Continue to offer educational presentations to a wide range of audiences, integrating new materials and timely 'angles' keeping the message consistent but 'fresh'

Acknowledgements

RDOS WildSafeBC is grateful for the generous support the program receives from its sponsors, partners and volunteers. Thanks to our sponsors: The RDOS, the Ministry of Environment, and British Columbia Conservation Foundation. Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance; the South Okanagan Similkameen Community Program - Brynn White, Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance - Marg Holm. A heartfelt thank you to the BC Conservation Officer Service and specifically Inspector Barb Leslie, Sgt. Jim Beck, and staff; Abhi Sharma; WSBC BCCF staff (WSBC Provincial Coordinator Frank Ritcey, Jen Bellhouse, Barb Waters and staff); fellow mentors across the Province.

Figure 6 Bears and wildlife displaced by fires and lack of water in the higher reaches

