

WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook Year End Report, 2015

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MOUNTAINS OF OPPORTUNITY
CRANBROOK

Executive Summary

The 2015 season featured a perceptible increase in local bear activity in our communities, specifically in Cranbrook. Local biologists and Conservation Officers attributed this to a poor natural foods year, brought on by an early and long hot summer. Human-bear conflicts occurred in diverse neighbourhoods and the root causes of these conflicts were equally diverse attractants, many of which were not reported on in 2014.

Aggressive does were a more common occurrence in Kimberley in the spring and summer of 2015 compared to 2014. In addition to this, WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook addressed calls regarding foxes, badgers and cougars.

Educational programming in schools continued to be the main focus of the WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook program in 2015, including WildSafeBC's Junior Rangers. Collaborative projects, radio and print media outreach, public displays and presentations to special interest groups mostly comprised the remaining program offerings. WildSafeBC continued to gain public exposure in Kimberley and Cranbrook in 2015 and relationships with project partners grew even stronger.

After two seasons in Kimberley and Cranbrook, WildSafeBC will benefit from a strong foundation in the 2016 Season. There was a clear and unmet need for programming in the surrounding rural areas in 2015, and also for outreach in the early spring. An April start and sponsorship from RDEK Areas C & E would further strengthen the program in 2016.

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Highlights of the 2015 Season

Educational Presentations

The Junior Rangers Program

2015 was the first year for WildSafeBC's Junior Rangers Program. In Kimberley-Cranbrook, this program built on existing school presentations by encouraging students to take action on wildlife attractants around their home, and to be ambassadors for recreating safety in town and in the backcountry. Participating classes at Cranbrook's Gordon Terrace Elementary (grade 4) and Kimberley's Lindsay Park Elementary (grade 3) received two presentations (Bears, Predators/Ungulates) with interactive games and activities, and completed a bear-safe home checklist.

The program was well received and requested by more teachers in 2016. Grade 4 students proved to be the program's best audience: the students were old enough to receive the material well, but young enough to appreciate the prizes received. For 2016, a three-part program is recommended to allow enough time for students to process the information as well as facilitate games and other activities.

Classroom and Early Childhood Presentations

By the end of October 2015, 38 educational programs were delivered to over 1,300 students in Kimberley and Cranbrook in 2015, including:

Early Childhood/Primary

- Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy's (CBAL) Strongstart Program (2-5 years), Kimberley
- Kindergarten, Kimberley Independent School

Intermediate – Bears, Predators and Ungulates

- Grade 3, Lindsay Park Elementary, Kimberley
- Grade 3, Marysville Elementary, Kimberley
- Grades 3-6, TM Roberts Elementary, Cranbrook
- Grades 3-4, Gordon Terrace Elementary, Cranbrook

Middle & Secondary – Wildlife Safety in the Backcountry

- Grade 9, Parkland Middle, Cranbrook
- Grades 10-12, Selkirk Secondary, Kimberley
- Grade 12, Mount Baker Secondary, Cranbrook

Special Interest Groups

In addition to classroom presentations, WildSafeBC presentations were delivered to:

- Junior Chamber International (JCI) Kootenay, Cranbrook
- Kootenay Orienteering Junior Trail Runners
- Kimberley Riverside Campground
- Kimberley Nature Park Society Volunteer Hiking Guides

Events & Displays

WildSafeBC participated in a number of community events in Kimberley and Cranbrook throughout the season, building on participation in 2014. Select events were of particular value to the program, there are highlighted in **bold**:

- **FWCP/RM Naturalists Turtle Day** (May)
- **Kimberley Public Works Day** (May)
- Healthy Kimberley Community Celebration (May)
- Aq'am Aboriginal Days Celebration (June)
- Sam Steele Days (June)
- **Kimberley Farmer's Market** (July)
- **Cranbrook Farmer's Market** (August)
- **Kootenay Country Fair** (September)
- **Kimberley First Saturdays Oktoberfest** (October)



Figure 1 - Participants of Cranbrook's Sam Steele Days play a bear-themed memory game (left); Community Coordinator Sonja Seher at FWCP and RM Naturalists Turtle Day (right).

Garbage Management

Garbage continues to be the number one attractant of concern in Kimberley and Cranbrook. The 2015 season saw an increase in human-wildlife conflicts related to household waste, specifically in Cranbrook where there was an overall increase in bear sightings since 2014 (133 in 2015 vs. 52 in 2014)

Garbage Tagging Events

Garbage tagging campaigns were conducted in the spring and fall in Kimberley. Student volunteers from Selkirk Secondary (Kimberley) aided with spring activities, identifying outdoor storage of waste as a problem going unaddressed. These findings were taken to the **City of Kimberley** at a council delegation in July 2015.

2015 saw a rise in human-bear conflicts in the **City of Cranbrook**. Garbage tagging campaigns were conducted for select neighbourhoods in the fall of 2015 to build upon the outreach conducted by local Conservation Officers.

City of Kimberley Garbage Bylaw Amendment

WildSafeBC appeared as a delegation before Kimberley City Council in July of 2015. The conversation included the discussion of a trial bear-resistant household waste bin program (to address the issue of outdoor storage of waste) and amendments to the Garbage Bylaw. *In September 2015, the City of Kimberley voted unanimously to incorporate the amendments suggested by WildSafeBC and the City's Operations Department.* WildSafeBC will again appear as a delegation before Kimberley City Council in November 2015.

Media Outreach

Print and Online Media

As in 2014, WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook prepared submissions (listed below) to daily papers: the **Kimberley Daily Bulletin** (herein referred to as the Bulletin) and the **Cranbrook Daily Townsman** (herein referred to as the Townsman). Online weekly news journal East Kootenay Now (**EKnow**) published one submission from WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook in 2015. With over 12,000 readers, EKnow is a valuable partner in outreach.

- WildSafeBC 2015 Season Starts – Bulletin/Townsman, June
- Fawning Season Safety – Bulletin/Townsman, June
- WildSafe(BC) in the Summer – Bulletin/Townsman, July
- Important Rules to Follow in Berry Season – EKnow, July
- The Fine Art of the Fence – Bulletin/Townsman, October

Radio

In 2015, WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook continued to work with Cranbrook's **theDriveFM** radio news team to deliver short radio spots regarding issues in human-wildlife conflict. Radio media proved once again an effective means of outreach, reaching 65,000 listeners in and beyond both communities.

Social Media

Weekly and, at times, bi-weekly Facebook posts were used as another means of notifying Kimberley and Cranbrook residents of recent wildlife activity. Timely advice on safety, attractant management and upcoming events were also disseminated via Facebook. With just 105 likes, WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook Facebook posts had the greatest reach when shared out by project partners, including: Wildsight, the City of Kimberley, the Kimberley Nature Park Society and others.

Door-to-door Outreach

Door-to-door outreach efforts in 2014 proved most effective when used in neighbourhoods experiencing regular wildlife sightings (but not necessarily conflicts) or wildlife conflicts related to specific and localized attractants. As such, door-to-door campaigns in 2015 were less frequent but more targeted. Campaigns addressed concerns related to: outdoor garbage storage, fruit trees, habituated bears, and aggressive deer activity.



Figure 2 - Community Coordinator Sonja Seher speaks with a Cranbrook resident about community resources for harvesting fruit.

Collaborative Events & Projects

Deer Safety Education & Outreach w/ the City of Kimberley's Urban Deer Advisory Committee (UDAC)



In preparation for fawning season (spring) and the rut (fall) WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook and the UDAC collaborated to deliver deer safety presentations in Kimberley's elementary schools. These short presentations educated students on basic behavioural changes to watch for, and recommended safety practices around deer.

WildSafeBC worked with local bylaw officers at the City of Kimberley to manage temporary signs warning residents of aggressive doe activity in the late spring and summer of 2015. These signs were used to respond to reports from residents received by the Conservation Officers Service, the City of Kimberley and WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook directly.

Figure 3 - A sign warns residents of aggressive doe activity in Kimberley

Harvest Celebrations w/ Wildsight

In September of 2015, residential fruit trees surpassed household garbage as the leading attractant for bears in Kimberley-Cranbrook: an unprecedented occurrence in WildSafeBC's two seasons of operation locally.

In a volunteer capacity, the WildSafeBC community coordinator partnered with the local Wildsight branch to organize community apple picking and pressing events in Kimberley and Cranbrook in the fall of 2015. These events aimed to bolster community engagement and use of the Fruit Tree Registry and Equipment Bookings. The community coordinator helped to promote the event and spoke before the participants on the importance of managing fruit attractants for wildlife.

Electric Fencing Workshop w/ Gillian Sanders

To respond to increasing concerns related to beehives, small livestock, and fruit trees, WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook hosted a workshop on electric fencing. The event was open to the public and was attended by ranchers, guide outfitters, apiarists and local business owners. Gillian Sanders of WildSafeBC Kaslo and the Grizzly Bear Fencing Project profiled and detailed temporary and permanent fence installations adapted to the dry East Kootenay climate, providing a demonstration for participants.

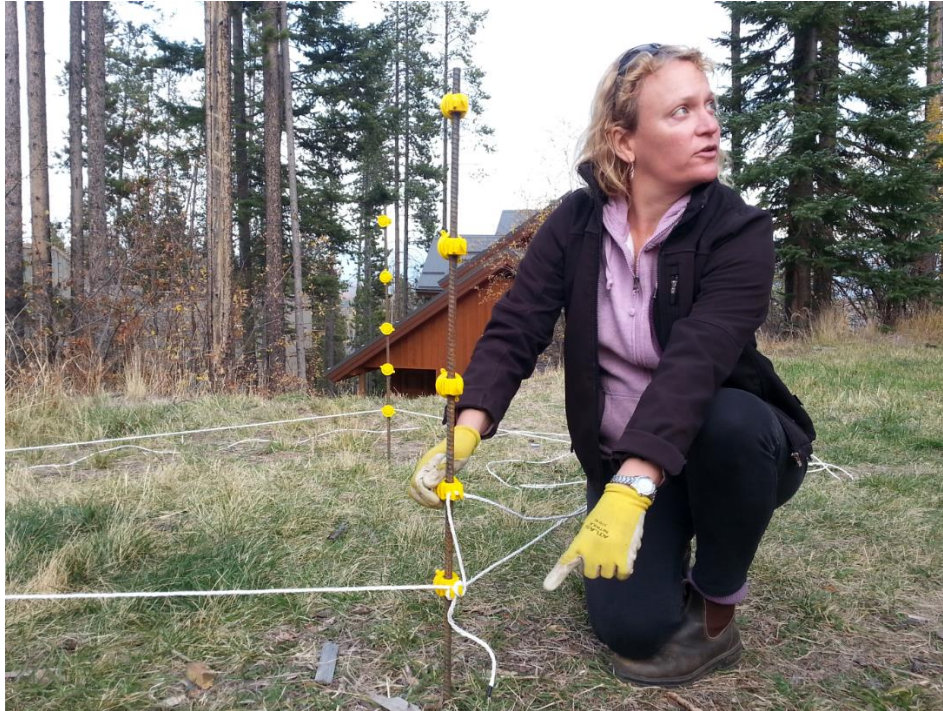


Figure 4 - Gillian Sanders demonstrates a temporary electric fence installation.

Challenges in the 2015 Season

2015 was the second season of operation for the WildSafeBC program in Kimberley and Cranbrook, and some important lessons were still to be learned.

As in 2014, the late spring season start for WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook again proved limiting. Bear activity was first reported to the Conservation Officers Service in Kimberley in April 2015, and by early May a number of animals had become conditioned to human food sources. An **April start in 2016** would enable the Community Coordinator to be responsive to these issues and to prepare for a busy spring season of school presentations.

The cities of Kimberley and Cranbrook are the program's current local sponsors, and the program is currently delivered only within their municipal limits. Over the course of the 2015 season, a number of calls were received from rural residents in the Regional District of East Kootenay's (RDEK) Areas C & E requesting program support. These calls largely pertained to high conservation priority wildlife species, including grizzly bear and American badger. **Sponsorship from the RDEK Areas C & E** would support a more comprehensive WildSafeBC program locally: empowering the Community Coordinator to respond to rural residents and reports, and to proactively address issues in rural human-wildlife conflict.

Goals for the 2016 Season

- Secure support from RDEK Areas C & E to deliver programming to rural areas surrounding Kimberley & Cranbrook.
- Deliver Junior Rangers Programming to grade 4 classes at the Kimberley Independent School, McKim Middle School (Kimberley), Gordon Terrace Elementary (Cranbrook) and TM Roberts (Cranbrook).
- Develop educational programming for Primary (grades K-3) classes.
- Continue to collaborate with the City of Kimberley's Planning and Operations Department, as well as City Council to support solutions to household waste attractants in Kimberley.

Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to staff at the Ministry of Environment Offices, including: Conservation Officers Jeff Scott and Jared Conatty, Biologist Irene Teske and COS Support Tracy Young. Their knowledge, insight and willingness to work together have been essential to the success of the program in 2015. WildSafeBC also appreciates the cooperation of local media outlets, our community partners and most of all the engaged residents who help to keep wildlife wild and communities safe.

Thank you to staff at the BC Conservation Foundation (including Frank Ritcey, Jen Bellhouse and Roseanna Niedzjeko) for their administrative support in coordinating this program in 2015.

WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook's educational programming would not be the same without such an attentive audience and supportive educators. Thanks to the students of Kate Haennel's Outdoor Education Class for their volunteer time, to Mrs. Sharpe and Ms. Nahm's Junior Rangers and to all the students, teachers, principals and administrative staff who contributed to a great season.