

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2020

Cumberland

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Coordinator



Executive Summary

This year-end report will describe the activities of the 2020 WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) in Cumberland. The WildSafeBC (WSBC) Cumberland Program covers the Village of Cumberland including the surrounding parks, recreation areas, mountain biking trails, Comox Lake, and Cumberland Lake campground (Figure 1). From January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020, cougars were the most reported species to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP), followed by black bears and deer.

The WCC gave 7 WildSafe Ranger presentations to over 100 participants hosted by Cumberland Community School, Cumberland Parks and Recreation, and Hand-in-Hand Early Years Nature Education Program. The display booth at the Sutton Road entrance to the Cumberland Community Forest reached over 300 people. Bin tagging took place over 12 nights in the community and through ongoing education and bylaw enforcement, the number of bins placed out early remains low. Highlights of the season include door-to-door messaging to over 600 residents as well as continuing collaborations with LUSH Valley fruit gleaning program.

Some of the challenges this season included the lack of reports of wildlife in conflict or dangerous wildlife within urban areas to the COS. These reports are critical as they allow for mitigation measures to be put in place before a conflict escalates and provide information to the public through WARP. As well, there are a high number of fruit trees both on private property and in public parks and green spaces. The situation is complicated by the heritage nature of the fruit trees in Rotary Orchard Park and No.1 Japanese Town Site Park. The trees are high-calorie and consistent sources of food that attract bears year over year. While the town has seen improvement, improperly stored garbage and unmanaged fruit trees are still the top reported attractants in Cumberland.

This year, the WCC created a database of maintenance programs inclusive of cost for the Rotary Orchard Park. Furthermore, the WCC provided suggestions for future fruit gleaning events to be held in the orchard.

WildSafeBC is grateful for the ongoing support by the Village of Cumberland, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation. As well, collaborations with groups, Village staff, local businesses and community members are a critical part of our success. Thank you all for your work in "keeping wildlife wild and communities safe".

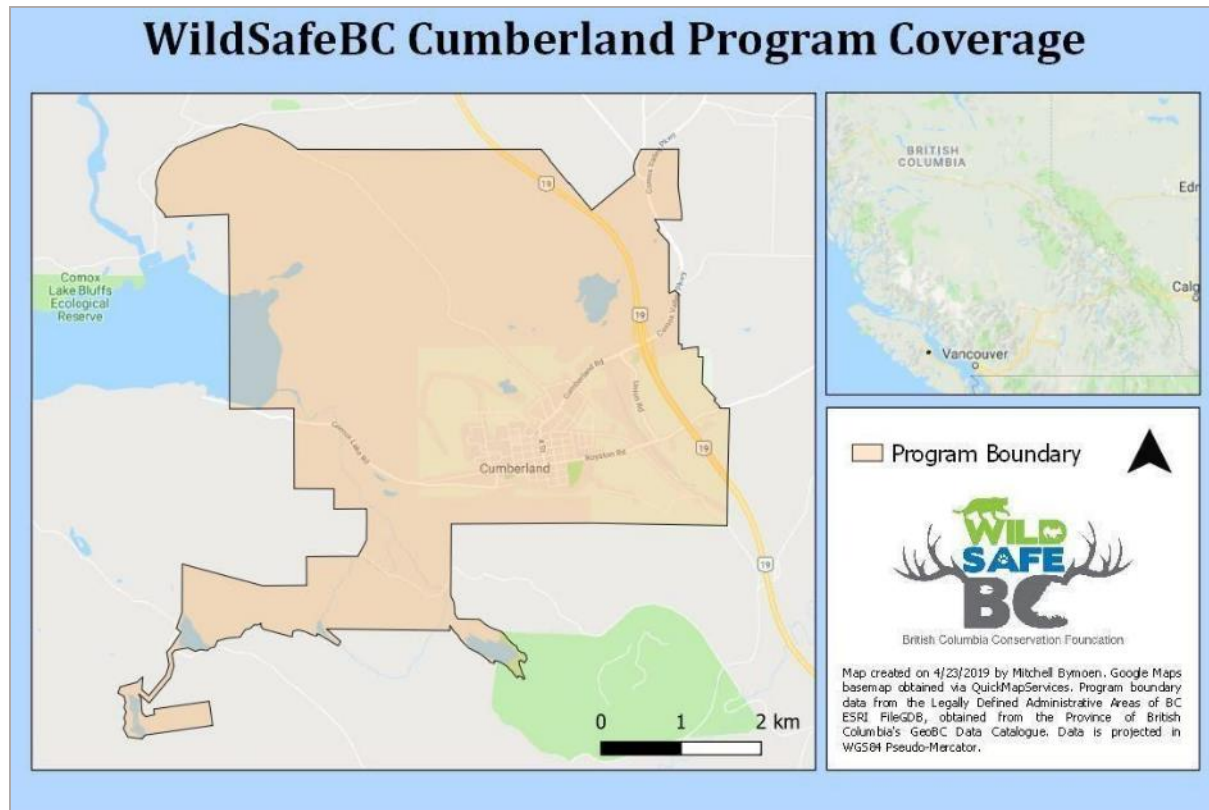


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Cumberland program coverage area.

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Cover photo: Cumberland Community Forest Sutton Road entrance, August 2020 (Photo credit: Kennedy Thorson)

Highlights from the 2020 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 the graphs below include wildlife encounter data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020. So far this year, cougars are the most reported species to the COS followed by black bears and deer (Figure 4).

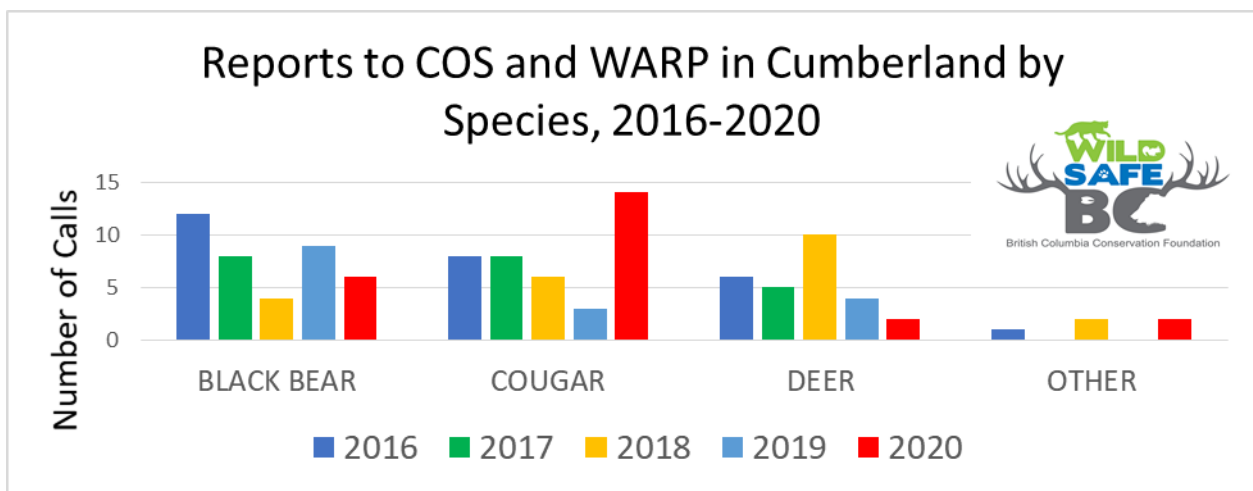


Figure 2. Reports to COS and WARP in Cumberland by Species, January 1, 2016 - November 15, 2020.

Despite the high number of anecdotal reports and evidence of black bear activity (bear scat, damaged property etc.), there are few reports to the RAPP line (Figure 3). The low number of reports may be due to a combination of two factors: the resistance of the public to report bears and other wildlife sightings and the positive impact of education and bylaw enforcement. The enforcement of the garbage bylaw has resulted in less attractants being available and fewer food-conditioned animals that would get into conflict. No black bears were destroyed in the village of Cumberland in 2019 to date, and in the last three consecutive years.

Black bear activity is seasonal province-wide and in the Village of Cumberland (Figure 3). In cool, winter months when food becomes scarce, black bears often den and enter torpor. In milder climates such as Vancouver Island, some bears may remain active throughout cooler months if food sources remain accessible. However, bears are typically most active April to November with peak activity when domestic fruit becomes available or when the bears enter hyperphagia (a period of intense eating) in the fall prior to denning. The availability of easily accessible unnatural food such as garbage close to residential areas, and availability of natural foods in the wild directly impact the number of human-wildlife conflicts each year (Figure 4).

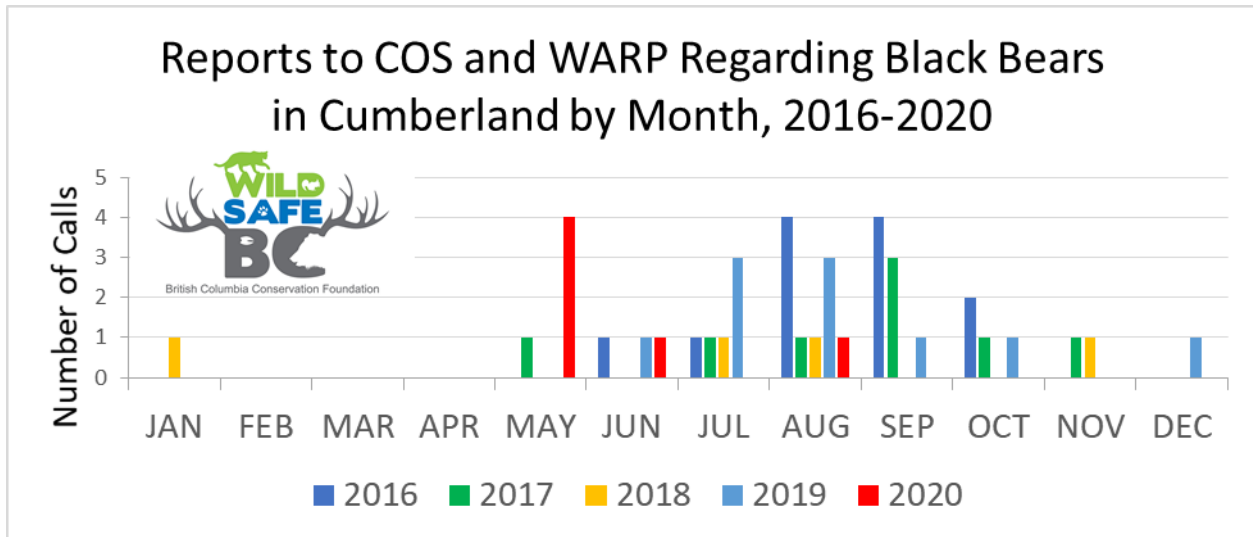


Figure 3. Reports to COS and WARP regarding black bears in Cumberland by month, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

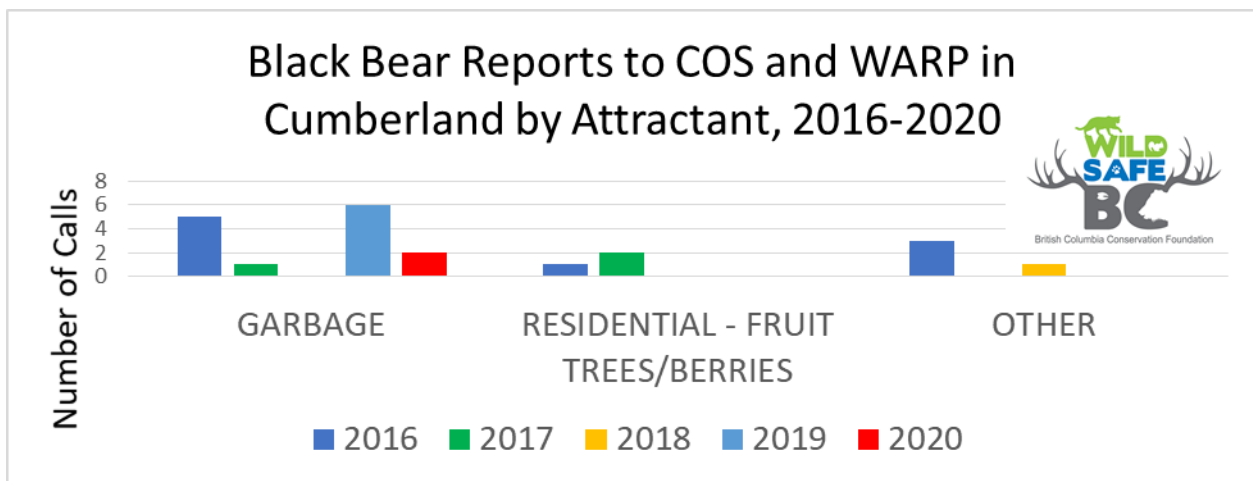


Figure 4. Black bear reports to COS and WARP in Cumberland by attractant, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

Cougar encounters consist mostly of sightings and occasional reports of cougars preying on domestic cats (Figure 5). It is not clear what is causing the spike in cougar calls in 2020, however it may be correlated with expansion of residential areas into previously forested land over the past two year. Furthermore, there are many urban deer in the village that may also attract cougars. WildSafeBC recommends trail users carry bear spray and that house cats be kept indoors, especially at night.

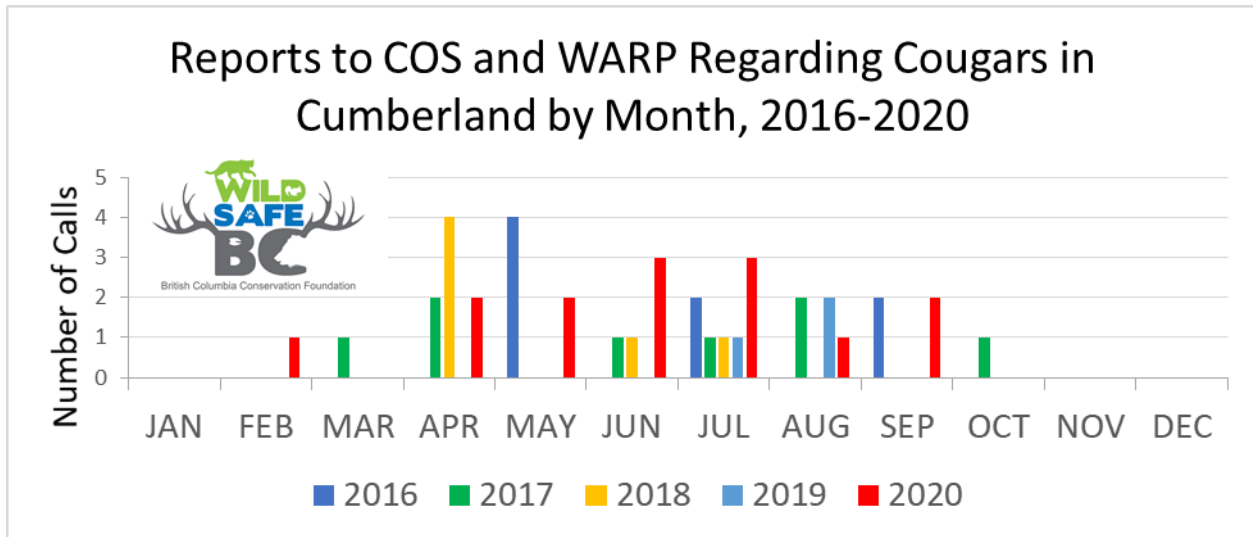


Figure 5. Reports to COS and WARP regarding cougars in Cumberland by month, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

Though there have only been two reports of deer so far this year, urban deer are a growing concern in many communities and conflicts are increasing province wide (Figure 2). Deer will at times aggressively protect their fawns leading to human and pet injury. Deer are also a leading species involved in vehicle collisions. There is no estimate on how many urban deer roam Cumberland and deer conflicts often go unreported as they are not deemed a threat by many.

WildSafeBC COVID-19 Mitigation

All of the activities performed this season followed safety guidelines provided by the Province, WorkSafeBC and/or the BC Conservation Foundation's Safety Coordinator. The WCCs were required to provide safety plans if they were organizing events where people would congregate. Wherever possible, in person activities were replaced with video conferencing. WildSafeBC adapted and modified requirements as the Province moved from Phase 1 to Phase 3. The WCCs worked closely with their local communities to ensure that all local requirements and restrictions were respected.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WCC provided 7 WildSafe Rangers presentations to 100 students and educators at Cumberland Community School Grade 1 and Grade 2, Hand-In-Hand nature education preschool (Ages 2-4), and Cumberland Recreation summer camp. Presentations covered wildlife biology of bears, cougars, and deer with varying depth dependant on age group. All students were provided with WildSafe Rangers kits at the end of the school day to take home to present to their family after reviewing the WildSafe Rangers oath with the class. This was a great way to ensure the message reached a broad range of families throughout the community.

Display Booths

Though large events have not been possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WildSafeBC display booth was set up four times at two outdoor venues this year (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

This year's BC Goes Wild event consisted of two display booths at separate locations during the last weekend of September resulting in 177 visitors. BC Goes Wild is a campaign to celebrate wildlife in BC and it occurs in September which is typically the month when human-bear conflicts are at their highest in BC. The display booths were advertised on the WildSafe Village of Cumberland Facebook page with a 10-day fun-fact countdown. The display booth at Village Park yielded 18 visitors in just over 5 hours whereas the Sutton Road entrance to the Cumberland Community Forest yielded 159 visitors in just over 5 hours. The turnout of both locations reflects the weather conditions that weekend. Furthermore, 90% of visitors at the Sutton Road location were mountain bikers about to enter the trails. The WCC responded to many questions regarding the use of bear spray while biking and if it would be effective on wildlife other than bears.



Figure 6. Display booth at Village Park.



Figure 7. Display booth at Sutton Road trailhead to Cumberland Community Forest.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

Approximately 600 residences were visited by the WCC during door-to-door campaigns. The WCC left a door hanger and brochure about black bear, cougar, deer, raccoon, and/or mice. During fruit season, the WCC also provided a Lush Valley fruit gleaning program information card.

Bin tagging consists of placing educational “warning” stickers on garbage cans and/or organics bins that are placed on the curb the night before collection (Figure 8). Bin tagging has occurred during 9 outings from June to November (Figure 9). Over the 1,800 residences canvassed during each outing, there was an average of 4 or 5 infractions, this average remains the same as last year with an average of 4 or 5 bins per tagging event. One event had 10 bins tagged which was unusually high. Ticketing by the bylaw department has been very effective in reducing these numbers and most people comply to avoid the fine. After following up with households that received warning notices on their bins only one household was determined to be a repeat offender and left their bins out the night before. This demonstrates the effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours.



Figure 8. Attractant found in bin placed out the night before pickup (left), educational warning sticker with contact information (right).

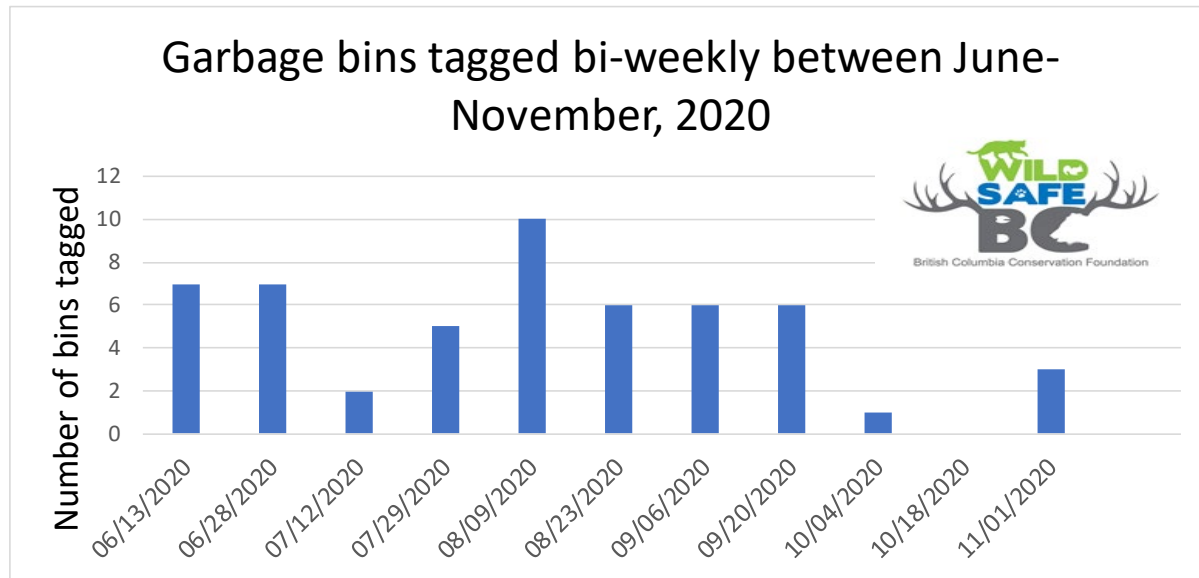


Figure 9. Garbage bins tagged bi-weekly between June and November 2020.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Village of Cumberland page's popularity grew, with 212 followers on January 1st 2020, to 285 on October 10th, 2020, an increase of 34%. In 2020, over 120 posts were made to the page including posts shared provincially. This goes hand-in-hand with the increase in door-to-door canvassing as each brochure provided a scannable QR code for the communities Facebook page as well as a request to "like us on Facebook". The WCC was interviewed for a press release that was published online and in the local newspaper by the [Comox Valley Record](#) the newspaper is delivered and/or made available to Comox Valley residents and all surrounding areas reaching nearly 85,000 residents.

Wildlife in Area Signs

Wildlife in area signage was placed in areas where wildlife had been recently reported. It was taken down 48 hours after the most recent report. Cumberland is a hotspot for mountain biking with hundreds of kilometers of biking trails and hiking paths in the hills and mountains behind the community. Signage is vital to keep community members and visitors informed and aware they are in bear and cougar country. On two occasions cougar in area signage was placed out at the disc golf course within five hours of reported sighting, when the sign was to be picked up (48 hours after sighting) the sign had been stolen. In the future it may be best for the WCC to hang signs high with the use of a ladder to prevent vandalism and theft.

Collaborations

WildSafeBC Cumberland continues to work in collaboration with the Conservation Officer Services who provide much needed support, information, and updates on wildlife activity. Collaborations with Lush Valley Fruit Action Society regarding BC Goes Wild as well as door-door canvassing in late summer/early fall is beneficial as it provides residents with a fruit management solution if they are unable to adequately conduct maintenance themselves. Furthermore, collaboration with Cumberland Parks and Recreation are highly valued and one WildSafe Ranger presentation was made to a summer camp hosted by the Recreational center this summer. The Comox Valley Tourism and Information Centre continues to distribute WSBC brochures and provide information about our program as well as advertise contests if provided with supplementary materials.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

Indigenous awareness and engagement was a key initiative for WSBC this year. Research was conducted on local First Nations, the K'omoks. The WCC increased cultural awareness during an online Indigenous Canada course that explores Indigenous histories and contemporary issues in Canada offered through the University of Alberta.

Special Initiatives

The Orchard Park heritage fruit trees are a significant wildlife attractant in Cumberland as they are abundant throughout the village and in the heritage orchards on the edges of the town, attracting bears to residential areas (Figure 10). To address this, the WCC developed a management plan for the park including estimates on cost of fruit tree maintenance and gathered information regarding treatment, removal, tree pruning (production style and urban style), long term implementation of a maintenance program, and a tree replacement program with non-fruit bearing trees. Furthermore, the WCC contacted apple pressing companies to obtain cost estimates for hosting a community apple pick and press event in the future.



Figure 10. Example of large quantity of apples on trees (left), close up of apples overall health (middle), and fresh scat found at the Orchard Park (right).

Challenges and Opportunities

Fruit-producing trees remains a source of conflict in the Village both as an attractant to wildlife (bear, deer, raccoon, and rats) and a cultural conflict with many local people at odds in terms of how to resolve the issue. There are several consistent hotspots in the Village for black bears due to consistent sources of fruit - Keswick Avenue, Allen Avenue, and the Colliery Trail running behind the south side of town. The WCC in collaboration with Lush Valley went door-to-door canvassing in areas with many fruit trees and high wildlife activity and encouraged residents to participate in Lush Valley's fruit share program. Future initiatives regarding fruit tree maintenance should include electric fencing demonstrations.

The WSBC Business Pledge Program was new to communities across the province. Several businesses were approached and receptive to this initiative. A goal for 2021 is to encourage businesses to commit to preventing human-wildlife conflict by signing the pledge. To promote the pledge, the WCC should:

- Host a "bears and beers" event to showcase businesses that have committed to the pledge
- Have a raffle for WildSafe swag for businesses that commit to the pledge within a certain time frame
- Contact media presence (radio/newspaper) beforehand and advertise the program before approaching businesses.

Despite the lower number of reported conflicts this season, it is still imperative to maintain awareness of wildlife in the community.

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Village of Cumberland would like to acknowledge our generous sponsors, supporters, and partners. A big thank you to the sponsors of this program who make it possible including the Village of Cumberland, the British Columbia Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Thank you to the staff of the Village of Cumberland for providing a welcoming space and storage of program materials and equipment.

Thank you to Sergeant Mike Newton and Gordon Gudbranson with the Conservation Officer Services as well for keeping the WCC up to date on wildlife encounters, as well the Black Creek COS office.

Special thank you to James Abrams, Municipal Peace Officer, Bylaw Enforcement & Animal Control for Village of Cumberland for assisting with garbage tagging as well as the Orchard Park heritage apple tree project.