

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen

Prepared by:

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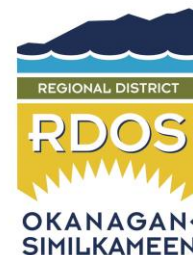


Naramata is a Designated Bear Smart Community

Please manage your garbage & attractants

Report conflicts or aggressive encounters to the Conservation Officer Reporting Line: 1-877-952-7277

Proudly Supported by:



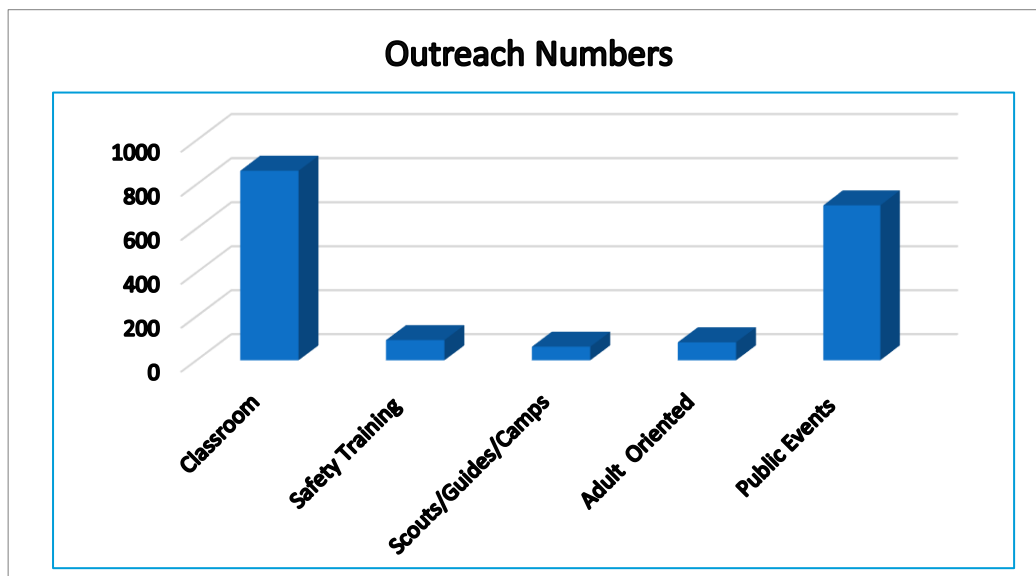
Executive Summary

2019 was a year with triumphs and disappointments. Highlights include receiving another five years of Bear Smart Status for Naramata and building on relationships with Indigenous neighbours to include collaboration on outreach materials from Syilx perspectives. These high points are in direct contrast to our low point, the unfortunate destruction of five bears in a single day, in one neighbourhood in the City of Penticton, and an overall increase in bear destructions in the Okanagan as a whole.

Wildlife activity for the most part was normal, with a few exceptions. There was an escalation in the number of bear related calls to the CO Service RAPP Line or RDOS, which seemed to be a Province-wide occurrence. Also for the first time deer conflict calls exceeded bear calls. RDOS WildSafeBC Coordinator, Zoe Kirk was very busy responding to calls, attending meetings and conducting additional classroom presentations due to the increased bear activity. Outreach education continues to be the foundation of the RDOS WildSafeBC (WSBC) program.

Figure 1: Graph showing the different outreach activities in the RDOS in 2019.

Key statistics: Outreach activities directly reached 1641 people:



Collaboration is key to the success of most local government programs. The RDOS WSBC program is a regionally focused program crossing five municipalities and nine Electoral Areas. Maintaining comfortable working relationships within other Local Governments is important when wildlife issues surface. The RDOS also works closely with several partners on this program including the Conservation Officer Service and the BC Conservation Foundation. More arm’s length non-government organizations partners include the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program (SOSCP), Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance (OSCA), and the agricultural sector and its many commodity groups.

Several rewarding goals were achieved in 2019.

- The renewal of Bear Smart Status for Naramata 2019 – 2024
- The start of a multi-year collaboration on developing Syilx based outreach materials (Indigenous perspectives, stories and co-presentation goals).

Key challenges this year, similar to other years include time available and resources. With the success of the RDOS WSBC program, the increasing requests and opportunities for outreach have surpassed capacity. The program runs year round in the RDOS, but many times requests and activities are greater than the available funded hours. With the onset of more bear and deer related issues, several communities have requested more attention and education for their citizens. Maximizing the available hours to achieve the broadest affect is a constant focus.

In 2020, the RDOS WildSafeBC program will seek to address the challenges, continue to build relationships and seek additional funds to broaden the scope and reach of the program. Both the District of Summerland and the community of West Bench have expressed the desire to become Bear Smart, which will lead to a very busy upcoming year. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help “keep wildlife wild and our communities safe”.



Photo 1: Okanagan Falls Elementary – WildSafeBC Rangers Day

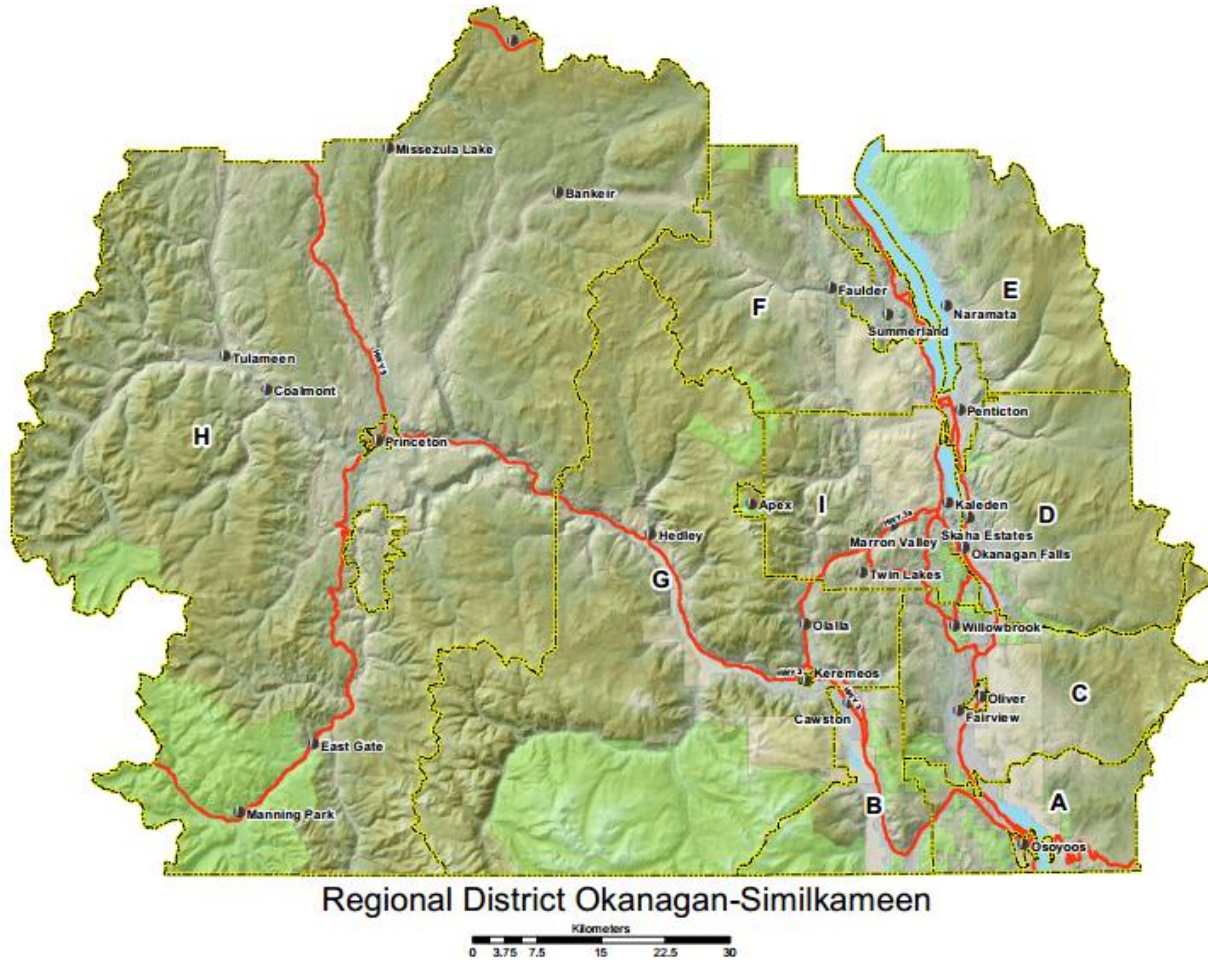


Figure 2: RDOS WildSafeBC program coverage area; 10,400 sq km



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Cover Photo: RDOS Parks sign and wildlife resistant garbage can decal throughout Naramata

Deer: google stock image Bear: Similkameen courtesy of Blanche Schroeder

Highlights from the 2018 Season

Wildlife Activity

Calls made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) are available to the public through WildSafeBC’s Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). This data is updated daily and this report for the RDOS communities includes data from January 1, 2019 to Nov 30, 2019 (Figure 3). Figure 4 shows the breakout of calls by ‘attractant’ and garbage remains the most reported attractant. It should be noted that many calls concerned urban nut trees as the main attractant. Bear calls are similar to provincial numbers which reflected a higher than average conflict year for bears.

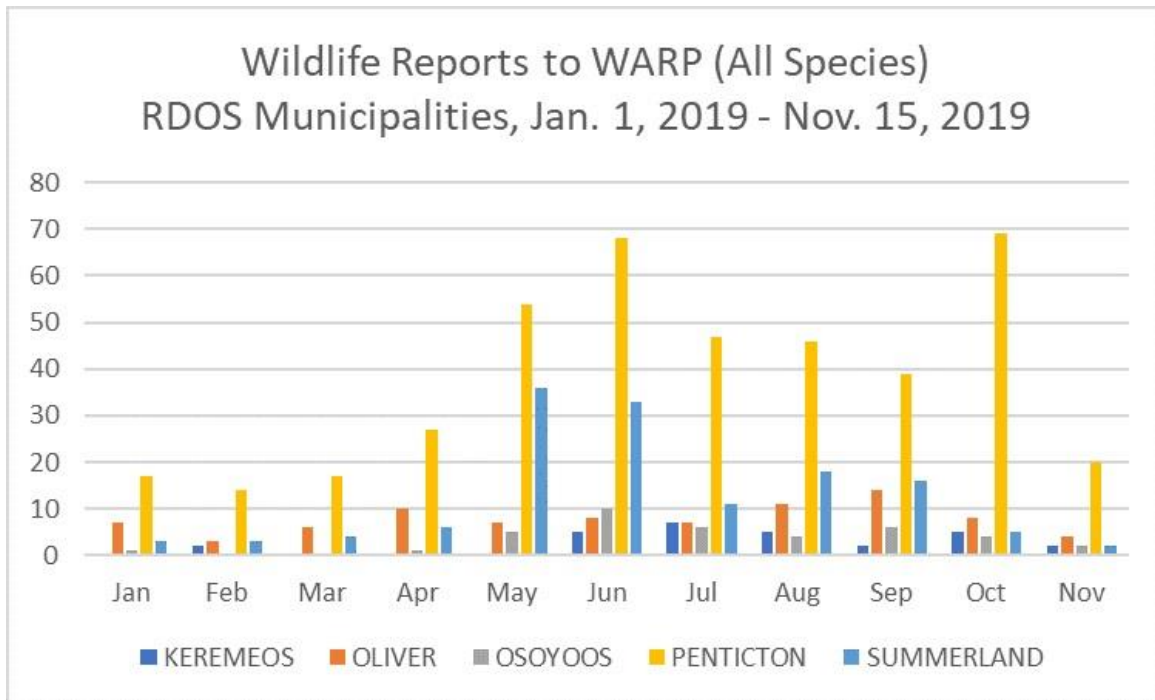


Figure 3: Reports to the COS and WARP all species from January 1, 2019 to Nov 30, 2019

Note: 744 Total calls. Calls to centralized areas = 707 leaving 37 calls from rural areas. This can be misleading as often (like West Bench) address algorithms place the caller in Penticton when it is in Electoral area “F”.

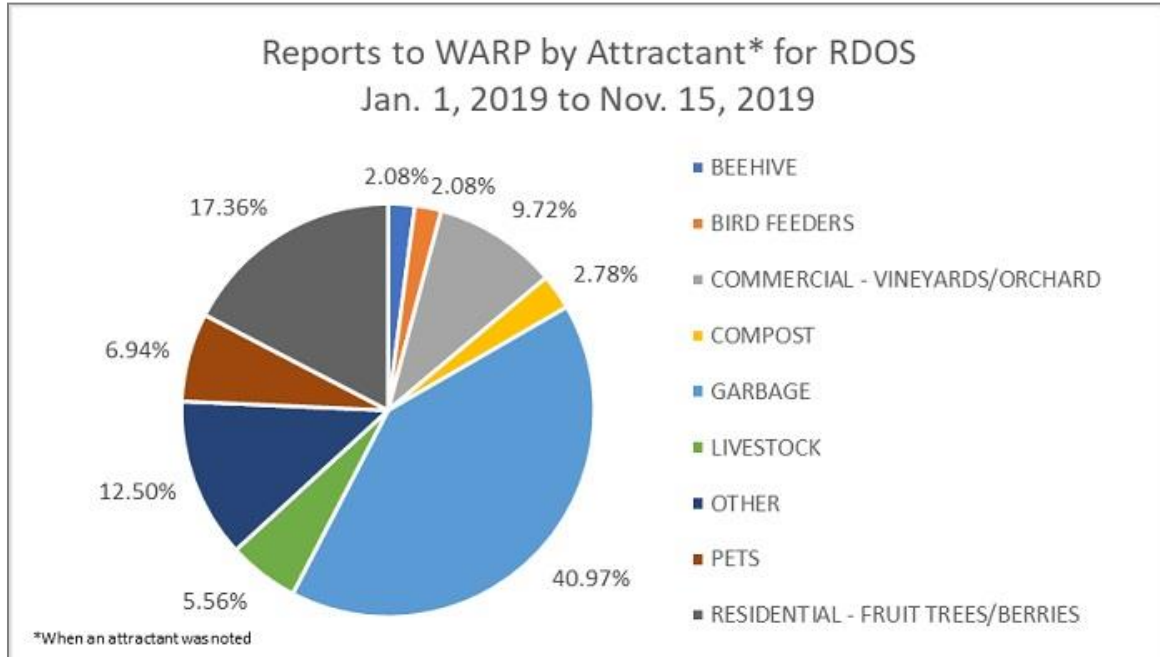


Figure 4 Breakdown of all calls by 'Attractants'

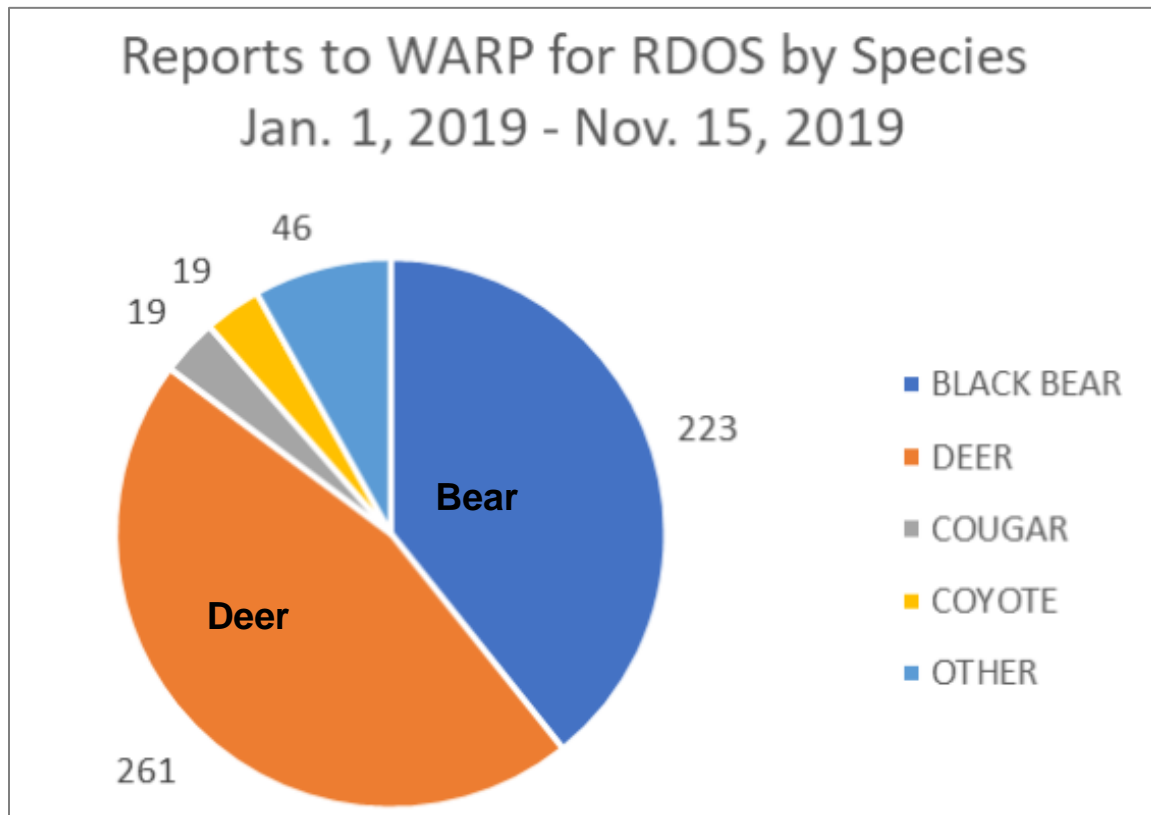


Figure 5 All Species call breakdown for RDOS region

Note: 2019 is the first time deer calls have exceeded bear calls - even as this was a higher than usual bear activity year

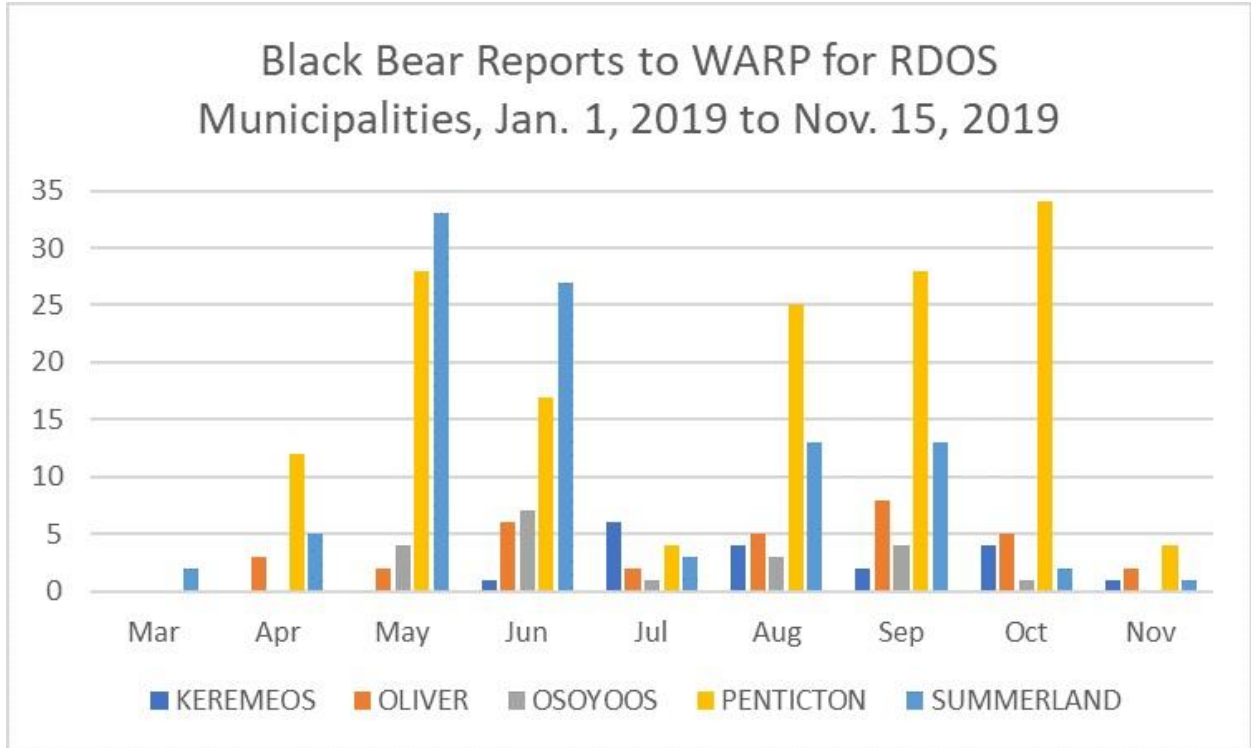


Figure 6: 223 Bear specific calls to RAPP line and WARP

WildSafeBC Ranger Program

In 2019, the Junior Ranger Program was renamed to the WildSafeBC Ranger Program. RDOS WildSafeBC breaks down the program to be age specific, so not all materials are used each time. This program is ideal for the Scouting and Girl Guide type organizations.

A total of three groups and one school participated in the Ranger Program. Two hundred and five students or troop members became WildSafeBC Rangers and received Ranger kits (Table 1). All groups received the extended program that included outdoor activity(s) and a take home assignment on attractant management to be reviewed in class or at the next group meeting.

Table 1. Schools that received the Junior Ranger Program in 2019.

School	Grade	Students	Extended
Penticton 2 nd Beavers	Ages 5 -7	45	Yes
Penticton 2 nd Scouts	Ages 8 - 11	20	Yes
Okanagan Falls Elementary	K-6	125	Yes
SPCA Summer Camp	Ages 6 – 12	15	Yes



Photo: 2nd Penticton Beavers – proudly holding up their activity artwork, “My Favorite Thing About Bears”



Presentations to Community Groups

The RDOS WildSafeBC program provides community presentations and attends events as requested. They are different each year but a consistent request is to attend Electoral Area Town Halls or Forums. Home Owner's Associations call upon the Coordinator bi-annually, as people move in and out of communities. In 2019, 2 forums and a community group provided 82 people direct access to answers about wildlife issues in their communities.

Public Displays and Events

Community Events are often an excellent vehicle to present information on WildSafeBC and answer questions from the public. In the Okanagan (a tourist mecca), events selected must fit program objectives: educating residents as the first priority and visitors or vacationers second. Therefore, the program earmarks specific times of year or events that have the highest local turn out. Events attended in 2019 were: The South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls (SORCO) Open House, and The Keremeos Grist Mill's Teddy Bear's Picnic. The WSCC took a hiatus from the Farmer's market circuit choosing to do markets bi-annually. Even in a protracted year, the program directly connected with 705 people at public events.



Photo: South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls

Garbage Tagging

Garbage tagging in the RDOS was restricted to Naramata in the lead up to the second Bear Smart status evaluation. Naramata has taken Bear Smart to heart, only 27 garbage carts/cans/bags were placed to the curb early, and warning letters sent to residents.

The tagging component of the program can be difficult to undertake due to staffing issues; requiring two people per evening audit. Therefore, the WCC has modified the program somewhat to doing drive along 'sweeps' with a camera and audit form. The RDOS Bylaw allows for enforcement, and warning letters with a photo (date and time) has shown to be the most effective way to change behavior. The resident gets the first soft 'warning' letter with educational materials enclosed. If there is recidivism, the second letter is copied electronically to the Conservation Office Service for comment or follow-up.

Local Conservation Officers (CO) know we undertake these audits, and make efforts to educate and assist residents to comply with Bylaws or best practices. If called upon to step in, CO's know there has been a concerted effort on the part of the RDOS to rectify the issue. This system provides officers a background with which to draw upon if they need to engage a resident or property owner.

Social Media and Press

The RDOS has a good relationship with local print/electronic media. The RDOS Projects Coordinator, Zoe Kirk, is interviewed regularly on all things relating to wildlife issues along with other high profile portfolios which brings excellent attention to the WildSafeBC program. Local media solicits annual spring and fall articles to appear in printed and electronic papers throughout the region. Social Media platforms like Castanet, Penticton Now and Infotel with video interviews and article bytes, keep living with wildlife in our communities a regular storyline.

The RDOS also has social media platforms and the Coordinator often duplicates or chooses which venue is used to reach the broadest audience – depending on the message.

Global Television is as important ally in promoting WildSafeBC objectives or covering issues. Global provides excellent television coverage of special events like the recent Bear Smart celebration and respectful reporting on the five destroyed bears in the Wiltse area of Penticton. Link to coverage:

<https://globalnews.ca/news/6079154/more-garbage-seeking-bears-euthanized-in-b-c>

Annually, the RDOS invites all local media to a corporate lunch meeting to discuss communications. This initiative began in 2017 and 2018, with the two years of flooding and wildfires, and has continued to determine how to optimize the various ways the RDOS disseminates information on all its programs. The media is asked to critique our output, and we constantly look for improvements to assist each other's deadlines and needs. This strategy has proved to be one of the RDOS's best communications initiatives.

Collaborations

Collaboration and partnerships appear throughout this report; from the Conservation Officer Service to Indigenous neighbours, and to the media. The RDOS WildSafeBC Coordinator both nurtures relationships and calls on partners throughout the year.

In 2019, the CO Service had directives to conduct more garbage audits. In the collaborative approach to this initiative the coordinator worked with the CO's to broaden the reach and scope of the entire program. The CO's targeted 'hot spot' communities, Penticton and Summerland, and this allowed the WCCC program to focus in on completing the required work for a renewed Bear Smart status for Naramata.

Directed Initiatives for 2019

Bear Spray – constant priority initiative

The RDOS WSBC program regularly provides civic outside workers, managers and workers in the agricultural sector, summer staff at the Federal Research Centre in Summerland and other interested groups training on bear spray. In 2019, ninety-two people received training (hands on) for the safe carry and use of bear spray. Extensive take home materials are provided, as well as access to Working and Staying Safe in Bear Country Videos loaners.

Indigenous Collaboration

In late 2019, the RDOS WSBC program contracted the En'owkin Centre to produce collaborative outreach materials providing the Syilx perspectives on wildlife. Black Bear is the first animal to be developed in the outreach materials. The Syilx peoples have four foundation food chiefs, and black bear is one. Stories tell of black bear laying down his body to assist the two-legged peoples to survive. By adding indigenous stories and perspectives, these animals come alive, especially to children. The intent of this collaboration is to enhance the materials and to co-present in classrooms and at events to look at all the perspectives on wildlife. Black Bear materials will be followed by coyote, cougar and deer. It is expected that this initiative will take well over a year to complete.

Special Initiatives

Syilx Perspectives Collaboration

The collaboration described above with the En'owkin Centre is also a special initiative, and builds directly off a very successful project completed for Canada 150 Heritage (grant); which saw 1500 cottonwoods nurtured and then planted out to restore destroyed riparian habitat. The project included in-classroom instruction from local biologists, Traditional Knowledge Keepers and elders. Three thousand students from across the regions schools participated. This new project adds to the stewardship objectives and cross-cultural learning objectives of the RDOS and WildSafeBC.

Bear Smart Status Renewal for Naramata

This 5-year renewal requires an update to the original Bear Hazard Assessment and Management Plans. Once completed, the Ministry reviews the updated plans, and criteria outstanding or planned, tours the community, interviews political representatives, the CO's and residents.

To continue to build awareness the WCCC held a celebration with dignitaries and the entire elementary school participated. The event was captured by the media and showed the positive changes in the Naramata community and included a soft challenge to other communities to change behaviors.



Photo: Naramata students sing a special Welcome and Bear Song to elected officials and Ministry representatives – Naramata Bear Smart celebration Oct 24, 2019

Challenges and Opportunities

Climate change may be a factor in the increase of calls this year on bears, but also may account for the steady increase of deer related calls in our more populated communities that were overtaking bear calls. This trend may bring significant challenges across the Province in the future.

In addition to garbage, the fruit and nut trees continue to be a source of attractants that draw wildlife into residential areas throughout the region. The RDOS also administers the Noxious Pests portfolio (Tree Fruits) in much of the region and reserve funds have been developed in order to hire a University co-op summer student to conduct a robust residential tree fruit program. The objectives are to impart information on wildlife issues with fruit/nut trees and how best to reduce risk. This may include electric fence workshops, pruning, spraying and gleaning information sessions.

The maturing and success of the RDOS WildsafeBC program is showing great results. Opportunities are increasing to work closely with municipal Bylaw officers and waste management staff in regional communities. Within the RDOS, more requests for development plan reviews and Wildlife Risk/Protection policy development has taken a significant step forward. This progress is encouraging for continued program success for 2020 and into the future.

With the success of Naramata's Bear Smart status, countered by the destruction of several bears close to an elementary school, requests were received from several local school

principals. They would like a modified Bear Smart status project for their schools. This will be discussed both through WildSafeBC provincially and locally here at the RDOS.

Acknowledgements

The RDOS WildSafeBC program could not be successful without the ongoing support by the RDOS Board of Directors and staff. Special thanks go to: Cameron Baughen - RDOS Solid Waste Coordinator, Don Hamilton- RDOS Solid Waste Facilities Coordinator, Liisa Bloomfield - RDOS Engineering Manager, and the RDOS GIS Dept. Sincere appreciation for the valued input and continued support from the local Conservation Officer Service; Insp. Tobe Sprado, Sgt. James Zuchelli, and support staff and the Ministry of Environment staff. Also, remaining as unfunded 'partners' with the BC Conservation Federation, the WildSafeBC Program is very much a win-win, with special thanks to Provincial Coordinator Vanessa Isnardy and the Kamloops staff, and WSBC Coordinators from Okanagan Westside, Meg Bjordal and Town of Princeton Coordinator, Carolyn Blank.



Photo: Naramata Bear Smart celebration dignitaries left to right: Zoe Kirk of RDOS WildSafeBC; podium –Traditional Knowledge Keeper, Harron Hall; BC Wildlife Conflict Manager from Ministry of Environment, Mike Badry; Inspector Tobe Sprado, BC Conservation Officer Service; RDOS Chair, Karla Kozakevich; Summerland Councillor, Doug Holmes; PIB Elder Chris Eneas 'Kwastikin' and crouched behind Zoe is Shelby Thom, Global TV