

WildWise Yukon 2021-22 End-of-year Program Reporting

Prepared for

Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust

February 15th, 2022



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YUKON

Project activities

For the 2021-2022 cycle, WildWise Yukon (henceforth: WWY) had straightforward goals: have a successful second season for our Electric Fence Support Program, alter our Outreach Program so that we may continue to advocate for safe bear practices while adjusting for a global pandemic; use funding, connections, and labour hours to collaborate on First Nations-led projects; initiate our Bear Stories program; and continue being a positive part of the ENGO and wider Yukon community. The funding we gratefully received from the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust (henceforth: YFWET) was instrumental to run our Outreach Program and our collaborative projects with Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

Outreach Program

WWY's Outreach Program has been a full-time summer program for the past three years. Over the years, the outreach methodology has changed, but the advocacy has not: the Outreach Coordinator(s) engage with the public about travelling safely in bear country, living respectfully among bears, and practical methods to prevent or reduce human-wildlife conflict. In recent years, due to support from the Tourism and Culture Department, outreach was focused largely on Visitor Information Centres, events, festivals, day use areas, and campgrounds. However, COVID-19-induced limits on tourism and increased demand for work with locals altered our course in 2021. While our Outreach Coordinator did spend time speaking with visitors in Visitor Information Centres and travelling to events and festivals, he found that the places he travelled to were filled with Yukoners on stay-cation who were more than willing to discuss coexisting with bears. He began to visit busy campgrounds (Wolf Creek, Conrad Campground, Pine Lake, Kathleen Lake) on evenings and weekends and discussing bear-safe camping and recreating with the families he met there.

During the week, he fulfilled increasing requests from the community to deliver bear safety and bear spray training. The diversity of these groups – which ranged from daycare children to CIRNAC employees to Mt. Sima staff – required that Outreach Coordinator tailor the sessions to each group's needs. These were highly popular and positive word-of-mouth reviews meant that the Coordinator saw an increase in demand for Specialized Group Training Sessions as the season progressed. While several of these were specifically Wild Wise Yukon events, some of these were also conducted in partnership with other ENGOs (Yukon Conservation Society, Yukon Wildlife Preserve) for mutual promotion and greater impact.

Our program funding allowed us to provide this service for free, with the organizations only paying for inert bear spray if desired. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and we have already had requests to return. Long-time and new Yukoners alike told us that they had felt fearful and underprepared for bear encounters; that, while they had carried bear spray for years, that they had no idea how to deploy it; and that they had not realized the rippling effect that careless human behaviour can have on bears and other community members. This has only bolstered our belief that there is a gap in community bear knowledge that we can help to fill.

Although our project does not promote wildlife/habitat protection in a direct and traditional sense, we believe that connectivity between humans and bears is critical not only in protecting bears' habitat, but also in ensuring that those bears can live safely and well in that habitat. While bear habitat in the Yukon is relatively intact, we still have high numbers of bears killed annually in human-bear conflict. Achieving

harmonious coexistence goes beyond having land for bears to live on: it requires humans to act with community and bears in mind throughout their day-to-day.

When we (hopefully) run this program again, we hope to continue our trajectory towards community service and providing bear safety training to more groups and organizations. We also hope that the travel involved in the OC position will be centered less on visiting Visitor Information Centres and more on responding to community requests for outreach or training. Lastly, we have noted an uptick in interest in other kinds of human-wildlife conflict – i.e., human-lynx, human-fox, etc. – and hope to do more program planning in that department.

Signage project

WWY has been putting up wildlife safety and wildlife respect signage for many years, and these are often stumbled upon on municipal hiking and biking trails. These signs come in various iterations and with diverse messaging: they may urge viewers not to dump household waste into roadside garbage bins; remind them to keep their dog on leash to reduce the risk of a wildlife encounter; explain the benefits of carrying bear spray; or promote general appreciation for local bears and wildlife. In the last few years, a few local First Nations (Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'an Council, Carcross Tagish First Nation) have demonstrated interest in installing some of these signs on their traditional territories as well as developing new signs in partnership with WWY.

As such, in 2021, in partnership with TKC and our graphic designer Tanya Handley, we designed new Respect for Fish and Do Not Disturb Swans signs. The Respect for Fish signs were posted at popular fishing spots around Whitehorse area, urging sport fishermen in the area to practice respectful catch-and-release practices as to not cause undue harm or stress to fish. They explain how frequent catch-and-release can harm fish and how people can modify their behaviour for the benefit of the local ecosystem (picture in Appendix). They also remind people that bears may also fish at their favourite fishing hole; to leave the area if they encounter a bear fishing; and to always clean up their waste and attractants to as to not endanger bears and other land users. The Do Not Disturb Swans were posted at popular spring swan viewing locations, promoting respect and appreciation for swans and reminding land users not to use watercraft when swans are in the area.

It is important to WWY to use what skills, influence, and labour force we may have to support projects undertaken by Yukon First Nations. We were approached for this catch-and-release project and for the swan disturbance project and were more than happy to help. In total, we printed 82 signs, which have been and continue to be mounted in TKC, KDFN, and CTFN territory. In addition to promoting respectful wildlife viewing and harvesting practices, they also reinforce Indigenous governance over the land, animals, and water of their traditional territories.

These signs have not gone unnoticed, and in January of 2022 the Village of Teslin and the Teslin Tlingit Council asked WWY if they could print and install some of our signage on Teslin trails, a request to which we were more than happy to agree.

Due to COVID-19 and staff turnover at multiple organizations, we were not able to do as much in-depth collaboration as we would have liked on the signage project and didn't manage to design McIntyre Creek-specific projects in the projected timeline. Next time we undertake a similar endeavour, we will create a more definite timeline and task assignment so things may be more likely to happen in time.

Communications

How to effectively spread the word about respectful wildlife behaviour is a subject of some debate. This is especially true when your most important target audience is people who are not necessarily environmentally-inclined and who may not seek that information out in the first place.

Of course, our primary channel for communications is via our seasonal Outreach Coordinator. The Outreach Coordinator spreads our message via planned training sessions, roving interpretation, pitching a stall at community events and festivals, and participating in events such as guided bear hikes. This represents the lion's share of how we get to be known in the community and how we stimulate discussion with locals and visitors about what it means to coexist peacefully with bears/wildlife. According to our 2021-22 Outreach Program Report (attached), our Outreach Coordinator spread our message to over 650 visitors in visitor centres and provided bear spray training to over 500 people this past summer. These numbers don't count the people he was able to connect with in campgrounds and at community events. Of course, our end-of-year reports are another way in which we share our success and tribulations with our funders explaining how we plan to improve our programs and what has or hasn't worked in our outreach (these are also shared with the public and available on our website).

For visual learners, we create attractive and thought-provoking signage that they encounter on their local trails, as well as wildlife safety pamphlets they can pick up in any visitor centre or event. We are especially proud of our signage, which has now become a hallmark on many municipal trails reminding Yukoners and others that we share this land with wildlife. Pictures of some of our signage can be found in the Appendix.

Of course, in this day and age, any non-profit wishing to improve their reach also needs a social media presence. We manage an active Facebook page with over 2,000 followers where we share local wildlife-related news, images, and of course, wildlife safety messaging. We also keep our activities and projects up to date on our website so that anyone desiring more information about us can access it. WWY has just purchased our first smart phone and hope to delve further into content creation in 2022 and 2023 so that we may have a nice Instagram page and perhaps upload more YouTube videos.

Finally, we also share our message by offering a free bear safety training service to community organizations (full list included in the 2021-22 Outreach Program Report). This allows us to network with residents who may not have heard of us and could be influenceable on the subject of wildlife safety and respect.

How we meet YFWET's mandate

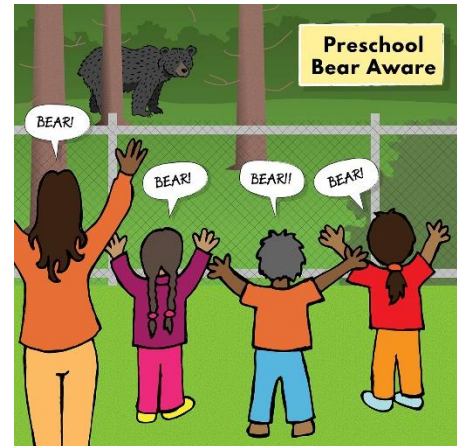
Our overarching goal with the above projects is to spread awareness about safe human-wildlife practices and promoting respect for the wildlife with whom we share the Yukon. These projects help prevent undue destruction of bears and other wildlife and support Indigenous governance, which falls under the "protection" tenet of YFWET's mandate. We believe that the cumulative effects of wildlife-safe practices and having respect for wildlife can go a long way in promoting conservation in a community.

Appendix: Media and images

Effective Outreach image

One share-worthy feedback was one WWY received from Early Learning at the Gardens daycare after the children in their care had received bear safety training from the Coordinator. This is a direct quote from the daycare staff:

"Well you'll never guess what happened today. We were having circle time outside with all the kids just like when you were here and we were reviewing what we had learned from you. Then, one of our kids stood up, spread his arms wide and said "BEAR". Sure enough, there on the other side of the fence, maybe 20-30 feet away, was a bear. All the kids stood up and said "bear!" And walked calmly to the nearest adult and as a group we all walked calmly through the yard and into the preschool. I was busting with pride and you should be too that these kids all knew just what to do to keep safe!"



Respect for Fish Sign

RESPECT FOR FISH

Fish or Xáat (Lingít) or Łúge (Tagish) or Łu (Southern Tutchone)

Fish need respect so they can reproduce for future generations. Give fish a break while spawning.

Fishing respectfully and demonstrating stewardship means considering how our actions affect both fish and the people that depend upon healthy fisheries. In order to ensure fish for future generations, we need to avoid excessive catch and release.

Catch and release can stress and even kill fish if not done correctly. If required to release a fish as a conservation practice or to comply with the fishing regulations follow best practices:

- Keep fish in the water
- Use single barbless hooks and
- Reduce your handling time.

Stop killing fish with your Smartphone

BEARS FISH HERE TOO.

If a bear is present, leave the area.

Please be mindful and share the river. Fish during the day and leave the river to the bears at night.

Clean up after yourself so bears can focus on fishing. Discard your bones and fish scraps back to the water.

Keep coolers and garbage in a locked vehicle.

Carry bear spray on your person at all times and know how to use it.

Visit WildWise for more info.
wildwise.ca
info@wildwise.ca

Honouring First Nations' Principles of SHARE, CARE & RESPECT:

Take only what you need
Care for the animals, land and water
Respect all living things and their habitats

Do Not Disturb Swans Sign

**Honouring First Nations' Principles of
SHARE, CARE & RESPECT:**

Share the water
Care for the animals, land and water
Respect all living things and their habitats



Other signs we have used in the past

Protect Yukon's Bears

- **Use the bear resistant garbage bins.**
Ensure the lid is closed properly.
- **Bin full? Take your garbage to the next one.**



- Bears can die from eating garbage.
- Bears with a garbage habit end up getting killed to protect the public.
- Bears can smell garbage from a long way off and will come out of the wilderness to find it.

Bears live here.

Follow these simple steps to **KEEP HUMANS AND BEARS SAFE** while you are in this area.

Never approach or feed a bear.

Bears can do a lot of damage if they are startled or defending their food or young. Conflict between humans and bears often means that the bear will be killed. You are putting the bear in danger if you try to interact with it.

Make noise so you don't surprise a bear.

Talking, singing and/or travelling with others reduces the chance of you surprising a bear.

Bears have excellent hearing and can smell things many kilometers away. However, like people, they are not always paying attention and may be surprised by you.

Slow down and stay alert.

Running, cycling and listening to music increase your chances of surprising a bear. Pay attention to your surroundings.

Be prepared.

Carry bear spray. Bear pepper spray is inexpensive, easy to use, non-lethal and may save your life if a bear attacks. Make sure your canister is not expired and know how to use it properly.

Keep dogs on a leash.

Even well-trained dogs may chase a bear towards you.

Bears travel through this area and eat many of the plants along the trails.

Bears are out of their dens from April to October and sometimes longer. They may even wake in the winter months to find food.

Bears reproduce slowly. Conflict between humans and bears puts their populations at risk.

Bears can be quiet and hard to see. Tracks and poo are sure signs that there are bears in the area.

Signs of bears:



Tracks

Whitehorse

Yukon College

