

# LET'S BE MORE BEAR AWARE

*By Mayor Bill Beamish*

According to WildSafe BC (a major advocate for preventing conflict with wildlife through collaboration, education and community solutions) our province is home to somewhere between 120 and 150 thousand black bears – one of the highest populations in the world. Pretty much all of BC is considered “bear country”, including the Sunshine Coast.

This year, human-bear conflict across the province has been unusually high, with the number of black bears destroyed by BC Conservation Officers up by 40% from 2018. Unfortunately, 14 of those euthanizations were here on the Coast, due primarily to improper management of bear attractants.

Clearly, bears are just doing what comes naturally – looking for high-calorie food with the least possible expenditure of energy. That means it's up to us (the humans) to change our behaviour so that easily accessible garbage, fruit windfall, bird feeders, dirty BBQs and other attractants do not create so-called “problem bears”.

In the Town of Gibsons, we have been working with our waste management partners, local conservation officers and concerned residents to address some of the more problematic areas in our community. We are also in the process of amending our garbage bylaw so it is a ticket-able offence to place recyclables, such as unwashed cat food tins, into the garbage. (It is already against the bylaw to put organic scraps into the waste stream.) Finally, we will be installing bear-proof garbage containers along trails that are often frequented by bears.

You can help by taking care with your garbage. Separate out all organics and recyclables. Keep your waste secure until it can be collected or taken to the recycle depot. Bleach is an extremely effective bear deterrent – sprinkle a little bit over your garbage to keep curious bears from investigating further. And please do not place household garbage into public trash bins.

You might also want to consider joining the recently formed “Sunshine Coast Bear Alliance”, a citizen-led group that is uniting residents, local government, developers, Conservation Officers and other groups to reduce human-bear conflict. They are currently looking for volunteers to join five specific committees and may be contacted via their Facebook page of the same name.

This holiday season, let's give the bears the gift they need most; respect for their natural behaviour, as demonstrated by more thoughtful behaviour of our own.

Best wishes to all for a Very Happy and Safe Christmas!

To comment on this, or any other topic, please feel free to email me at [mayor@gibsons.ca](mailto:mayor@gibsons.ca).

