



BEARS DESTROYED

What does this measure & why is it important?

This indicator tracks the number of bears destroyed by conservation officers in the Columbia Basin Boundary region since 2009. It also tracks the reported attractant that lead to the bear coming into conflict with humans in each community and regional district.

There are both grizzly and black bears living throughout our region, and the vast majority of the time, humans co-exist peacefully with bears. But when hungry bears are attracted to our delicious smelling garbage, fruit trees, pet food etc., they can become aggressive and accustomed to people. Once a bear learns to associate humans with food and becomes habituated to humans, they can become dangerous and conservation officers must euthanize these bears to protect public safety. There are many things we can do to reduce the number of bear attractants, and this indicator measures which attractants cause the most conflict, and where. This information can be used to point towards measures to reduce attractants.

Fortunately, there are many groups and individuals working to reduce these conflicts. Conservation officers do not want to be destroying bears and are working proactively with communities to eliminate attractants. Bear Aware (now WildSafe BC) works with communities to reduce conflicts in a variety of ways, and municipalities are looking for innovative ways to deal with the problem.

What are the trends & current conditions?

The number of bears destroyed varies from year to year, largely due to the size of the huckleberry crop. When there are lots of huckleberries available for bears to feed on, they keep themselves busy eating delicious berries, as was the case in 2009 and 2013. But when there is a poor crop, bears tend to look elsewhere for food, and often find it in and around human settlements. The huckleberry crop was poor in 2010, 2011 and 2012, and there was a corresponding increase in the number of bear conflicts in our communities (Figure 1).

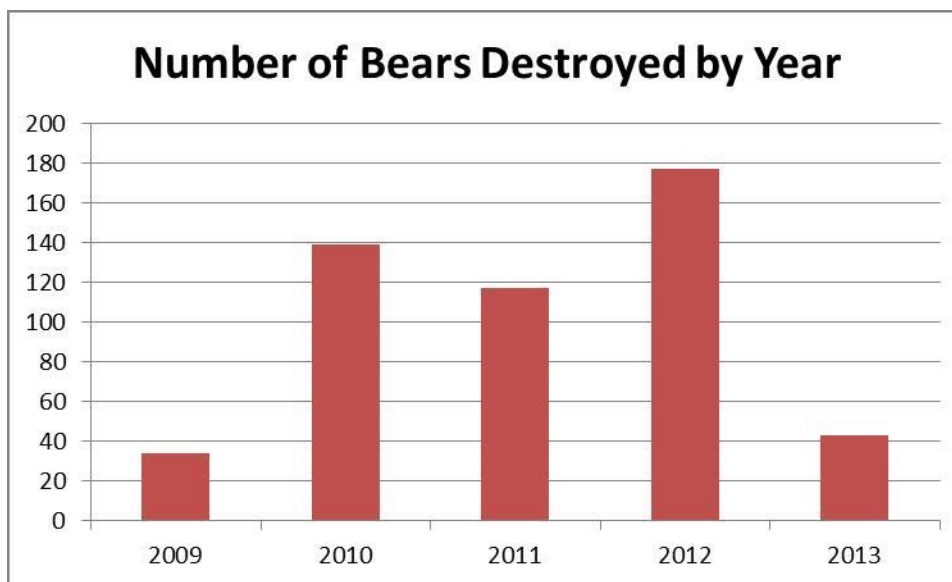


Figure 1: Number of bears destroyed by conservation officers in the Columbia Basin Boundary Region between 2009 and 2013

The number one attractant is still garbage – bears smell the garbage and get into dumpsters, landfills, and garbage put on the curb for collection. Once a bear gets into garbage, it learns that it is a food source and will continue to seek it out (Figure 2).

Fruit trees are the second most common reported attractant. This is largely due to fruit from trees that owners cannot or do not harvest, or from abandoned orchards. Many communities now have programs where volunteers harvest the fruit and give a third to the owners, a third to the local food bank, and keep a third to themselves. In this way, the fruit does not get wasted and the bear attractant is reduced.

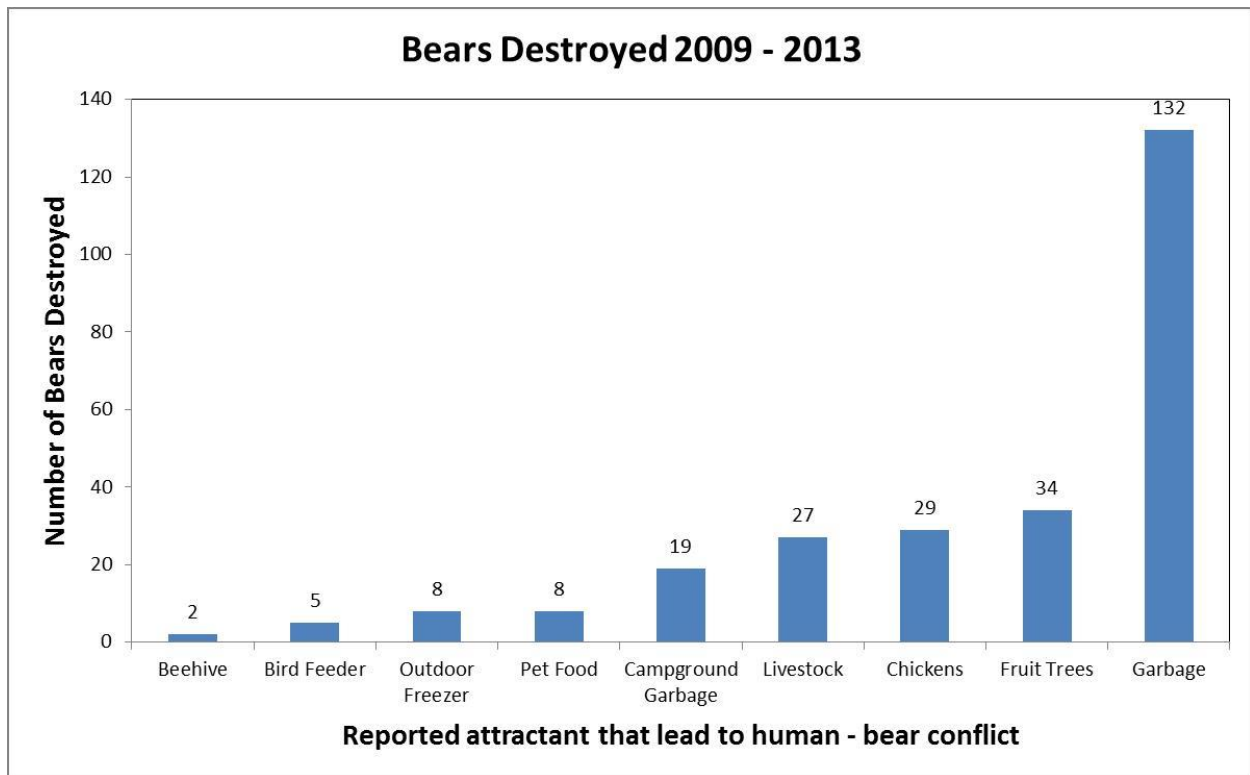


Figure 2: Reported attractant that lead to bears being euthanized by conservation officers in the Columbia Basin Boundary region 2009 – 2013.



The Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, at Selkirk College, is a regional centre of excellence in applied research and information provision focused on strengthening rural communities in the Columbia Basin-Boundary Region. Visit www.cbrdi.ca for more information.