
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy

Port Hardy achieves Bear Smart status

PORT HARDY – Learning how to live peacefully with bears is an ongoing challenge for many communities in B.C., but after several years of hard work and dedication, the District of Port Hardy has officially become Bear Smart.

The Bear Smart Community Program is a voluntary, preventative conservation measure that encourages communities, businesses and individuals to work together to reduce conflicts with bears. The program is designed by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, in partnership with the Union of B.C. Municipalities, and is based on six criteria that communities must meet in order to achieve Bear Smart status.

“As communities grow, we all have a responsibility to protect wilderness and the animals that rely on these beautiful natural spaces,” said George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. “I congratulate Port Hardy for taking action and demonstrating its commitment through achieving Bear Smart status. This is another example of community leadership that others will follow. This made-in-B.C. solution brings out the best in business, community and local government to create a positive legacy for our children and grandchildren.”

Located in a lush riparian area between two rivers on northern Vancouver Island, Port Hardy has a large population of black bears that frequently travel through the community to access the rivers and green space. Sometimes the bruins would stop in town to feast on unsecured garbage and food stored in outdoor fridges and freezers, which often generated calls to conservation officers.

To address the ongoing challenges with bears, Port Hardy completed a Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan in 2009, followed by a bear hazard assessment. Several policies were implemented from the plan and assessment, such as bylaws to manage garbage and a wildlife-resistant solid-waste management system that includes bear-resistant containers.

The initiative towards becoming a Bear Smart community gained momentum in 2016 with the formation of the Bear Smart Port Hardy Committee, which was made up of a councillor, staff member and community volunteers. The community has also developed and implemented a robust education and outreach program that includes presentations at elementary schools, brochures, a booth at local fairs and door-to-door campaigns.

Port Hardy is the ninth community in B.C. to obtain official Bear Smart status, joining Kamloops, Squamish, Lions Bay, Whistler, Port Alberni, Naramata, New Denver and Coquitlam. Several more communities are actively pursuing the designation.

Quotes:

Claire Trevena, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, MLA for North Island –

“Achieving Bear Smart status is difficult. People, businesses and communities have to work together to manage material that attracts bears. Congratulations to Port Hardy, which is setting a great example. If bears do not have access to non-natural food sources, they have no reason to hang around communities.”

Doug Forsdick, chief conservation officer, B.C. Conservation Officer Service –

“The B.C. Conservation Officer Service commends the hard work and dedication of Port Hardy to help mitigate human-wildlife conflicts. We hope other communities will turn to Port Hardy as an example of how to properly manage attractants to keep wildlife wild. Communities where Bear Smart practices are followed report fewer human-wildlife conflicts, which means fewer bears are destroyed. Thank you again for all of your hard work.”

Dennis Dugas, mayor, Port Hardy –

“It was the commitment of the volunteers working with the community that led to achieving the Bear Smart designation. I am so proud of our Bear Smart Port Hardy Committee and community for what they have accomplished as we work towards reducing the number of bears destroyed. This is only the beginning of what Port Hardy needs to do to become truly bear smart.”

Quick Facts:

- In 2019, the B.C. Conservation Officer Service received more than 23,000 calls related to conflicts with bears. Only a small fraction of those calls led to bears being destroyed in the interest of public safety or animal welfare.
- Kamloops was the first community to earn Bear Smart status in 2009.
- Communities where attractants are managed properly have seen a decline in related human-wildlife conflicts and in the number of animals that must be destroyed.
- The most effective and natural way to reduce human-wildlife interaction is to secure food attractants, such as garbage, birdseed, compost, pet food and fruit.

Learn More:

For more information about the Bear Smart Community Program and the list of criteria to become Bear Smart, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/wildlife/human-wildlife-conflict/staying-safe-around-wildlife/bears/bear-smart>

To learn more about the B.C. Conservation Officer Service, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/natural-resource-law-enforcement/conservation-officer-service>

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