

To: Regional and Corporate Services Committee
From: Christina Vugteveen, Manager of Parks and Recreation

Date: 2020-05-12
File No: 6140-01

Subject: WildSafeBC 2020 – Program Changes

RECOMENDATION

THAT the Fraser Valley Regional Board decline the BC Conservation Foundation grant of \$6,000 intended to assist with funding the annual WildSafeBC program.

STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS

Support Environmental Stewardship

Support Healthy & Sustainable Community

Provide Responsive & Effective Public Services

PRIORITIES

Priority #4 Tourism

Priority #5 Outdoor Recreation

BACKGROUND

WildSafeBC is a provincial program administered by the BC Conservation Foundation (BCFF). The program (formerly known as Bear Aware) was initiated in 1999 and has now grown to serve over 50 communities around the province. In 2013, the program expanded to incorporate other species of wildlife, which can also cause conflict with humans, such as cougar, lynx, coyote, raccoon, deer as well as bear.

WildSafeBC teaches communities through active outreach on how to manage wildlife in their neighborhoods and prevent animals from becoming a nuisance or even becoming aggressive. The program is a valuable tool to help inform residents on how to keep not only themselves safe, but also how to keep wildlife safe. 2020 would be the 10th year of the program in the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD).

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a review of services, which includes the WildSafeBC program. The focus of the WildSafeBC program is "keeping wildlife wild, and communities safe." The program is designed for a Program Coordinator to liaise directly with member municipalities, Conservation Officers, and respond to identified needs in a community. The program focuses on a number of areas including

wildlife calls/reporting to the conservation officers, presentations to school groups, door to door education, community events, and social media outreach.

The FVRD was recently informed from WildSafeBC that only \$6,000 would be available for the matching grant from the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) for 2020, which is \$9,000 lower than the anticipated \$15,000 in matching funds which are typically received. In addition, as the WildSafe program is highly focused on presentations to groups and classrooms and door-to-door education, the program would need to be significantly modified with the current COVID-19 pandemic since group gatherings and direct public interactions are not realistic activities anticipated for summer/fall 2020.

If the FVRD were to continue with WildSafeBC, the number of hours available would be reduced by close to 40%. The program would change to more of a web-based format to include a focus on online engagement through technologies such as Zoom, and media messaging platforms.

COST

The WildSafeBC program was included in the 2020 budget as a Regional Grant-in-Aid funded by all the members of the FVRD at a total cost of \$15,000. These funds were intended to match \$15,000 in funding, as in previous years, from the BCCF. Unfortunately, BCCF was only able to secure \$6,000 toward this program in 2020. Less funding, coupled with a program strained to reach its direct public outreach objectives in 2020 due to COVID-19, has called into question the efficacy of running the program in 2020. In addition, with the education and management of wildlife-public interactions being the responsibility of the Province, this drop in funding could be interpreted as further downloading from the Province.

Staff recommend declining the limited \$6,000 in funding from the BCCF and preserving the 2020 \$15,000 in funding from the FVRD Regional Grant-in-Aid program.

CONCLUSION

WildSafeBC provides an active outreach program and teaches wildlife management by keeping both humans and wildlife safe. This program has proven to be a valuable and effective tool for the community; however, COVID-19 and reduced funding has drastically changed the nature of the program. As the Province is responsible for education and management of interactions between wildlife and the public, it is not recommended to move forward with this program if the FVRD has to shoulder a greater proportion of the cost. Staff will still ensure that printed material from the WildSafeBC program is available to communities and will work to post similar wildlife messaging on its digital media channels where appropriate. It is anticipated that this program could be reinstated in 2021, depending on adequate provincial funding and diminished social distancing requirements.

COMMENTS BY:

Stacey Barker, Director of Regional Services: Reviewed and supported.

Kristy Hodson, Acting Director of Financial Services: Please note that matching funds aren't directly provided to FVRD from BCCF. There is an agreement in place that FVRD would reimburse \$15,000 of expenses incurred by BCCF which is at least 50% of the total costs for services provided. Reviewed and supported.

Jennifer Kinneman, Chief Administrative Officer: Reviewed and supported.