

Who are we?

The Bow Valley WildSmart program is a proactive conservation strategy that encourages efforts by communities to reduce negative human-wildlife interactions. **Learn more at www.wildsmart.ca**

This monthly editorial is an opportunity to explore some of the challenges we face in the Bow Valley as we strive to coexist with wildlife. **If you have any comments, questions or topic ideas, please send them to info@wildsmart.ca.**



Photos courtesy of Glenn Naylor



Dogs and Wildlife

Many dog owners in the Bow Valley cannot imagine an outdoor adventure or a stroll in the woods without their dog. They are our companions, family and often the most reliable hiking buddy one can get at short notice. They also contribute to the impact we have on wildlife. Everybody loves their dog and would never intentionally condone its chasing and killing of wildlife, yet this happens all too often. Small animals like squirrels and rabbits are often victims but deer, elk, and sheep can also be seriously injured from chasing pets.

As we head for the outdoors we are affronted with rules, such as “dogs must be on a leash”. This restriction hinders the freedom for both dogs and their owners. However, the reality is that

recreating with an off-leash dog has in the past, and will continue in the future, to result in injury, and sometimes death to wildlife, your pet, and yourself. The solution is not necessarily to leave your best

friend at home, but to take ethical steps such as leashing your dog, to reduce the influence you have on the environment you wish to enjoy and share with wildlife.



Why leash my dog this winter?

Domestic dogs, still maintain an instinct to hunt or chase. A trigger such as a hopping bunny or a herd of deer can be a stimulus for this instinct to unfold, regardless of how well your dog is trained. Any fleeing animal will often trigger a dog to chase.

Wildlife forced to run from a chasing dog will expend precious energy in order to avoid the perceived predator. In the winter, this flight can be life threatening, as many species

need to conserve energy reserves just to make it through the winter because food resources are low and temperatures are cold. Useless expenditures of energy may tip the balance between survival and winter mortality. It can also result in direct injury or death to the wild animal or indirect injury/death by pushing the wild animal into human use areas such as roads where it may be struck by a passing vehicle.

Large carnivores such as bears and cougars do not see your dog as a domestic pet. Instead, they likely perceive it to be a potential food source, a competitor for resources such as food, or a danger to themselves or their young. Every year, numerous dogs are attacked in the Bow Valley by large carnivores, likely due to the reasons listed above. Often the injury or loss of a pet also results in the death of the attacking

predator, as wildlife managers are often forced to act out of concern for public safety.

Wildlife that live and/or travel throughout the Bow Valley are forced to negotiate their way around our homes, roads and recreation areas. For numerous safety reasons we don't want some of these animals in our neighbourhoods, yet we force them to put up with us when we are in theirs. Pets off-leash is a human-wildlife issue that we can control. We can all take steps to ensure we have a lighter tread on nature and in doing so; keep wildlife and wild places abundant in the Bow Valley.

What can you do?

- Be a role model, walk your pet on a leash and teach your children, friends and neighbours about the importance of doing so.
- Take your dog to the off-leash areas for exercise. That is why they were created.
- Support initiatives to create, maintain, and/or enhance safe off-leash areas with features that maximize enjoyment for yourself and your dog.
- When you see a dog off leash, encourage the owners to put their pet on leash.
- While recreating, make noise to let others and wildlife know you are on the trail
- Let dog owners with dogs on-leash know how much you appreciate their consideration.
- Sick of holding a leash while hiking? Try tying the leash to your waist or buy a leash with a waist clasp.
- Let dog off-leash owners know of any wildlife you have seen in the area. It might help them decide to place their pet on leash.