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NEWS RELEASE

DRY SUMMER MEANS INCREASED WILDLIFE MOVEMENT THIS FALL; MOTORISTS REMINDED TO REMAIN ALERT

KAMLOOPS, B.C. (September 25, 2003.) – The Wildlife-Vehicle Accident Prevention Program (WVAPP) would like to remind all motorists that there might be an increase in wildlife movement across British Columbia’s highways in the next few months.

“Food and water, time of year, and habitat availability all contribute to when and where wildlife travels,” says Doug Jury, Wildlife Biologist, Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. In the fall, bear are foraging in preparation for hibernation, and deer and moose are entering the mating season. Despite the recent rains, the extremely dry summer in the Southern Interior means that some water sources normally available to wildlife have dried up and forage plants and berries are dry and withered. As well, the severe forest fires have affected the habitat for large numbers of wildlife.

Since food, water, and habitat are more easily accessible in valley bottom areas, wildlife tends to move towards these areas when supplies higher up in the mountains become depleted. Unfortunately, many road corridors are also built in valley bottoms. “When motorists and wildlife use the same travel corridors,” says Gayle Hesse, WVAPP Program Coordinator, “it leads to increasing numbers of wildlife-vehicle accidents.”

Bear Aware staff for the Southern Interior report that in Kamloops, there were 20% more complaints this August than there has been for the same month over the past 5 years. “Normally, September and October are the most active months,” says John Wiczorek, Provincial Bear Aware Coordinator, “but bear-human interactions this year have increased in parts of the province affected by extremely dry conditions and forest fires.” Dry conditions mean that normal food sources for bears are not available and the bears are on the move to find alternatives. These food alternatives often involve crossing major road networks located in the valley bottom areas, putting animals at higher risk of being hit.

WVAPP also reminds drivers in Kootenay National Park that the Wildlife Protection System, an infrared camera detecting and warning of the presence of wildlife on the road, is operational from **dusk to dawn** and that that the flashing lights mean “**slow down to the warning speed of 60 KPH**” as there is an imminent danger from wildlife present on or near the road.

WVAPP “Hints for the Highway” while driving this fall are:

- Slow Down and obey all posted signs – collision avoidance is improved at lower speeds.
- Drive Defensively – watch out between dusk and dawn.
- Be Alert – animals are unpredictable, often travel in groups, and may bolt unexpectedly.
- Use Your Vehicle – clean your headlights, use your high beams, and wear your seatbelt.

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For more information, please contact:

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