**President’s Report to the 2020 Annual General Meeting**

**Wildsight Elk Valley Branch**

Wild Nature Tours continued their popular hikes into the woods to discover fungus among us, forage in the forest and identify wild plants. The ever-popular winter snowshoe safaris were delivered to an appreciative audience of visitors discovering winter ecology in the Rockies. Volunteer snowshoe guide training in December prepared new guides to join the team delivering experiences.

Wildsight hosted a community forum for over 200 residents who attended to express their concerns over logging on private land near Fernie and throughout the Elk Valley where popular trails run. Updates were given on the process, damage and possible solutions to gaps in the Private Managed Forest Land Act.

A new ‘refillery’ business set up their pop-up shop outside the office in good weather and discussions have been ongoing to help the owners and other market vendors to move inside the existing office in future.

For Earth Day, we prepared a week-long display in the Fernie Branch of the East Kootenay Community Credit Union. One of our directors, Kristina, organized events in Jaffray including activities with prizes and films at the elementary school. Recycling bins were purchased for placement around the school. A larger event, with support from the PAC, is planned for next year.

Our Zero Plastic and Waste Management projects continued. The bag trees placed outside and inside stores were in place for a year, and although many bags were taken, very few were returned. The grocery stores reported, however, that use of re-usable bags increased by about 70% during this period, so we believe that, overall, the message has reached shoppers. Recycling education continued at the Canada Day celebration, the Wednesday Socials at Station Square and Wapiti music festival.

The spring Yard Sale, an annual event which Wildsight took on in 2017, continued last year with a successful community-wide sale and a good turnout at the white elephant sale tables in front of the Wildsight office.

An Apple Tree Pruning workshop was held in May with instructor Brooke Hall and 6 participants.

The RoadWatch program wrapped up in May having collected meaningful data for future development and transportation planning.

On the gardening front the annual seed swaps begun in 2005 continued as our second Seedy Saturday event was held in February. The event, co-hosted with the Fernie Family Garden, was held at the Fernie Family Centre.

The Community EcoGarden, in its 16th year, had all allotment beds filled with both fledgling and seasoned gardeners. The new hügelkultur demonstration bed was planted and thrived despite seedlings being flattened by a major hailstorm. Over the summer, the EcoGarden hosted a seed saving workshop in August and the Little Sprouts family gardening project continued in July and August.

A two-day Science Odyssey event, held at the EcoGarden for students and families, was funded by the National Science and Energy Research Council.

Keeping Food Real launched its online cold climate gardening course based on the EcoGarden’s hands-on workshops developed over the years.

Wildsight invited the Elk River Alliance to build a rain harvesting garden with eavestrough and barrel system on the toolshed at the EcoGarden. The garden was planted with native perennial shrubs, with informational signage installed on the adjacent fence.

We entered a one-year pilot with Fernie’s Mountain Market, having the market become a Contractor with the Branch. This arrangement added opportunities for engagement with the community at our market booth and brought a percentage of vendor fees to the Branch. We sold produce from the EcoGarden at our market booth, with the help assistance of our student hired in the Summer Works program.

The Tool Share program continued with the apple presses being the most used items. This program is appreciated by local residents who help support it with their donations.

We enjoyed another Fall Fair with good community turnouts for the artisan guild displays, fun activities and games, and the blue ribbon contests.

We displayed volunteer opportunities with the Branch and Wild Nature Tours at the Library’s ‘Not for Kids Social’, an event that gave organizations an opportunity to connect with community members interested in getting involved in local non-profit organizations.

The Branch welcomed one new Board member, Graham Preston, and said goodbye to two Board members, Tif McNaughton and Sharon Kelly. As always, we thank our outgoing and incoming Board members for their energy and time. We have worked with a smaller board than would be ideal and now invite members to consider joining our Board for 2020.