

Defenders of Wildlife

Electric Fence Incentive Program



Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to long term grizzly bear recovery in the lower 48 states. Conflict with people is a major cause of grizzly bear mortality and reduces human tolerance for the species. Defenders' Electric Fencing Incentive Program provides financial and technical assistance to help landowners minimize conflict by securing their livestock, beehives, gardens or other bear attractants. Our program field staff work directly with communities and landowners to improve awareness and implement conflict reduction measures across recovery areas in five grizzly bear ecosystems: Greater Yellowstone, Northern Continental Divide, Cabinet-Yaak, Selkirk and Bitterroot.

In addition to individuals and communities, Defenders collaborates with nonprofit organizations, small businesses, and state, federal and tribal agencies to complete a wide range of electric fence projects, primarily on private lands. We provide the financial support and technical expertise to build electric fence systems that effectively deter grizzly bears and other carnivores from accessing human-related attractants.

Program History

Defenders' electric fencing program is designed to proactively prevent conflicts, with priority given to landowners with past bear problems. At sites with completed fences that are maintained, we see a direct reduction in human-bear and other wildlife conflicts.

Initially, we reimbursed landowners \$100 of the cost to install an electric fence around an identified grizzly bear attractant. In 2012, we improved the program to reimburse 50% of the cost of electric fencing around any grizzly bear attractant within priority counties, up to a maximum incentive of \$500 per landowner. Large scale collaborative projects are also included each year.

Now in its twelfth year, the Electric Fence Incentive Program has a well-established track record of success. The program reached a major milestone in mid-2021 by completing the 500th electric fence project, as the popularity and visibility of the program continues to grow across Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and Washington.



Above: Defenders, USDA Wildlife Services, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes complete an electrified sheep pasture with a commercial producer in the Mission Valley of Montana

The program currently boasts 597 completed electric fences (see the spatial and temporal map of all projects completed to date on page 5) and over \$205,000 in reimbursements and financial assistance to participants since its inception.

2022 Results

In 2022, the program assisted with the completion of 55 electric fences, with reimbursements and materials costs totaling \$24,419. Our ongoing partnership with USDA Wildlife Services – Montana yielded an additional 11 projects where we provided strictly materials support. The majority of those 11 projects were the result of our collaboration with USDA Wildlife Services and Blackfoot Fish and Game working

specifically with Blackfeet Nation youth through the 4H Cooperative Extension program.

Defenders staff conducted sixteen site visits and fence installations with participants, including several direct responses to ongoing bear conflicts. Outreach events totaled four and included presentations, webinars, and tabling.

Average reimbursement (2022)

- \$321 per project

Fence type (2022)

- 82% of participants built permanent fences.
- 11% of participants built semi-permanent fences.
- 7% of participants built temporary fences.

Attractants secured

- In 2022, protecting chickens was the top reason for installing a fence, followed by livestock, fruit trees, and gardens (Fig. 1).

Program awareness

- In 2022, state wildlife managers were the most commonly cited source of referral to the program, followed by USDA Wildlife Services and word of mouth (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1: Percentage of fence projects by type of attractant secured (2022)

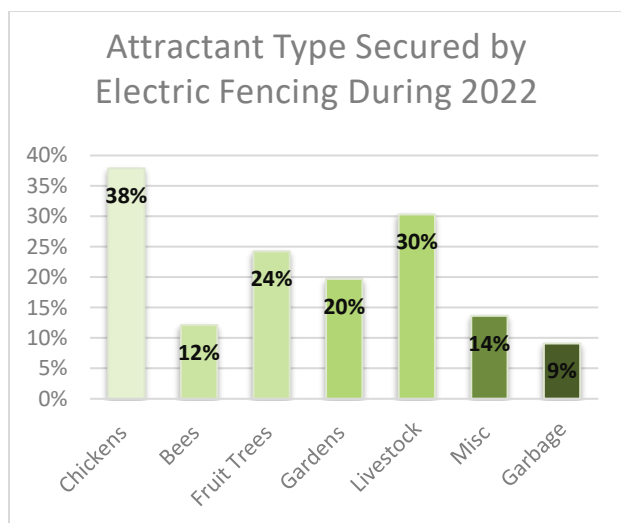
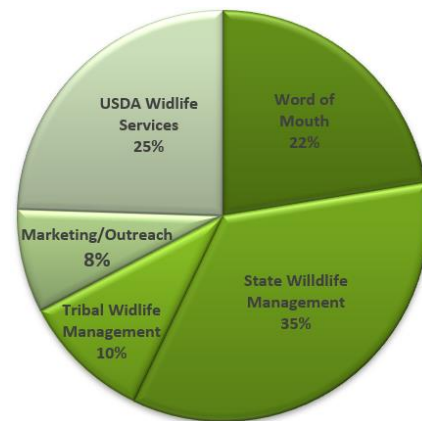


Fig. 2: How participants heard about the program (2022)



Participant Survey Highlights

Defenders monitors pre- and post-fencing success related to human-bear conflicts on private lands by surveying participants with electric fences in use for one or more years. In 2022, we conducted a survey of 300 past participants. Survey results indicate that:

- 52% experienced past bear conflicts at their site.
- 85% report their electric fence is still in use.
- 97% report that they have rarely or never had a depredation occur since their fence was installed.
- 3% report experiencing some type of fence failure resulting in a conflict.
- When asked how about how effective they considered their fence to be, on a scale of 1 (not effective) to 10 (very effective), participants reported 9.2 on average.

Testimonial from 2022 participants:

"We can't thank you enough for the help. Looking forward to a worry free growing season now. – B.S., Eureka, MT"

"Thanks to financial help, great instructions and advice, we now have a great fence to keep bears out of our fruit trees." -J.P., Missoula, MT"

"The problem bear is back but the fruit trees and chickens are protected and haven't been bothered. Thanks!" -W.M., Florence, MT"



Above: Defenders staff tests an electric fence around an orchard.

Right: A grizzly bear investigates an electrified cattle corral installed by USDA Wildlife Services Personnel, funded in part by Defenders of Wildlife.



Photo Credit: USDA Wildlife Services



Left: Newly electrified chicken coop and educational garden at a preschool in Missoula, MT. Completed in cooperation with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

Bottom Left: First completed electric fence project with new USDA Wildlife Services non-lethal technician, Chrissy Lambert. Miniature donkey night pen in Montana's Mission Valley.

Bottom Right: Following a conflict with a grizzly bear, this electrified sheep pasture in Northern Idaho was the Program's first project completed in collaboration with Idaho Fish and Game. The Kootenai Tribe of Idaho also assisted.



