

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. The program also contributes to several large scale, collaborative projects each year that require greater funding resources.

Now in its thirteenth year, the Electric Fence Incentive Program has a longstanding track record of success. The program continues to expand its reach across grizzly habitat in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and Washington.



Above: Defenders, USDA Wildlife Services, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes complete an electrified barnyard in the Mission Valley of Montana

The program has assisted with the completion of 665 electric fences (see the spatial and temporal map of all projects completed to date on page 5) and over \$234,000 in reimbursements and financial assistance to participants since its inception.

2023 Results

In 2023, the program assisted with the completion of 68 electric fences, with reimbursements and materials contributions totaling \$27,826. Our ongoing collaboration with USDA Wildlife Services – Montana, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Wildlife Management, USFWS and the Blackfoot Challenge were actively involved in 31 of the 68 projects. In addition to all of the electric fence

projects that the program completed in 2023, Defenders’ staff conducted a significant number of training exercises with agency personnel and community groups. This included a demonstration project at the USDA- APHIS National Wildlife Research Center in Ft. Collins, CO at the Nonlethal Initiative Workshop for Wildlife Services personnel from around the country.

Defenders staff conducted 21 site visits and fence installations with participants, including several direct responses to ongoing bear conflicts. Outreach events totaled seven and included presentations, demonstrations, and tabling.

Average reimbursement (2023)

- \$325 per project

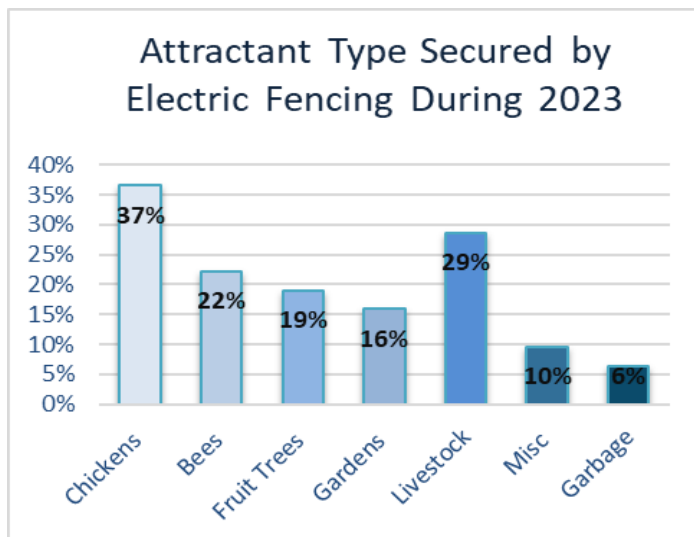
Fence type (2023)

- 76% of participants built permanent fences.
- 12% of participants built semi-permanent fences.
- 12% of participants built temporary fences.

Attractants secured

- In 2023, protecting chickens was the top reason participants installed an electric fence, followed by livestock and bees (Fig. 1).

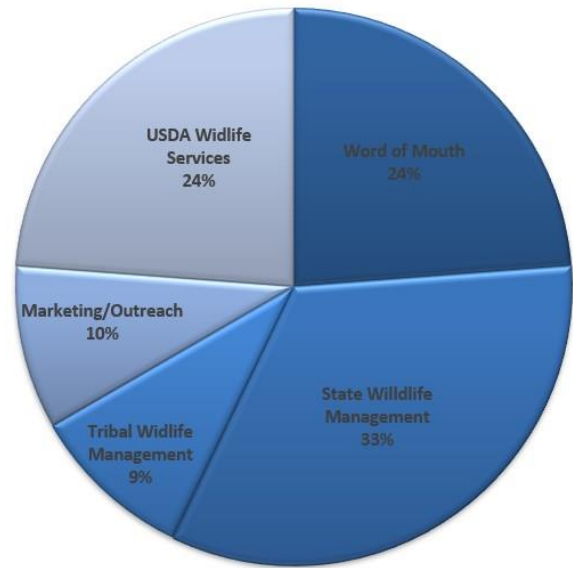
Fig. 1: Percentage of fence projects by type of attractant secured



Program awareness

- In 2023, 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. 2: How participants were referred to the program in 2023



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 bear conflicts prior to installing a fence.
- 85% report their electric fence is still in use.
- 97% report that they have rarely or never had a depredation or conflict occur since their fence was installed.
- 3% report experiencing some type of fence failure resulting in a conflict.
- When asked 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 2023 participants:

“Thanks again for the advice. Seriously, there are a lot of options and opinions out there and I was feeling uncertain about building an effective system. Y'all have made things much easier for me and have given me advice I trust. With your help, this was very manageable. I'm grateful!” -B. E., Holland Lake, MT

“You are very good at providing all the info anyone could need and saved me tons of research. Thank you!” - D. C., Libby, MT

“It's a great, safe, and effective deterrent. We had it up and running in a couple of days. Thanks for the financial help and instruction.” – S.B., Thompson Falls, MT



Photo Credit: John Stember/New York Times

Above: Newly electrified chicken coop in Montana’s Blackfoot Valley completed as a training exercise for Wildlife Services staff from Montana and Colorado.

Left: Defenders staff alongside Wildlife Services and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Wildlife Management staff, completing our first large scale project of spring 2023 with a livestock producer on the Flathead Reservation.

Bottom Left: Defenders staff explaining an electric fence design to the Big Sky Beekeepers group at a demonstration project in the Bitterroot Valley, alongside Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks staff.

Bottom Right: Defenders staff providing training on electric fence installation at the USDA- APHIS National Wildlife Research Center in Ft. Collins, CO at the Nonlethal Initiative Workshop .



Photo Credit: Defenders of Wildlife



Photo Credit: USDA Wildlife Services



Photo Credit: Michelle Dieterich

