

# Defenders of Wildlife

## Electric Fencing 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 Summary

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.

Now in its eleventh year, the Electric Fence Incentive Program has a well-established track record of success. This year the program reached a milestone, helping complete its 500<sup>th</sup> electric fence project. The popularity and visibility of the program continue to grow across Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and Washington. The total number of completed projects since the program began is now at 531 electric fences (see the spatial and



**Above: Defenders and US Fish and Wildlife Service staff collaborating with Idaho Fish and Game for the first time to complete a commercial garden fence in Northern Idaho with landowners recently visited by a grizzly bear.**

temporal map of all projects completed to date on page 5) and over \$177,000 in reimbursements and financial support to participants. For more information, visit the grizzly bear section of our interactive web feature, [Storymapping Coexistence Across the Country](#).

### 2021 Results

The combined total of completed projects in 2021 reached a respectable 65 electric fences, with reimbursements and materials costs totaling \$21,492. Despite fieldwork limitations surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, the program directly assisted 45 landowners with technical assistance and reimbursements. Our ongoing partnership with USDA Wildlife Services – Montana yielded an additional 20 projects where we provided materials support. The majority of those 20

projects were the result of our collaboration with USDA Wildlife Services, Marias River Livestock Association, Natural Resources Defense Council, Vital Ground Foundation, and Blackfeet Fish and Game working specifically with Blackfeet Nation youth through the 4H Cooperative Extension program.

Defenders staff conducted seven site visits with participants, including several direct responses to ongoing bear conflicts. Covid-19 restrictions prevented the attendance of any outreach events, but the Program continued to promote the securing of bear attractants via print media, a podcast, and a short film highlighting our 500<sup>th</sup> fence milestone.

### Average reimbursement (2021)

- \$378 per project

### Fence type (2021)

- 53% of participants built permanent fences.
- 22% of participants built semi-permanent fences.
- 25% of participants built temporary fences.

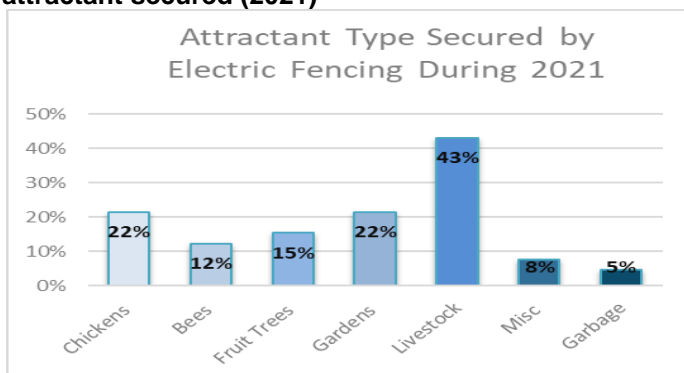
### Attractants secured

- In 2021, protecting livestock was the top reason for installing a fence, followed by chickens, bees and fruit trees (Fig. 1).

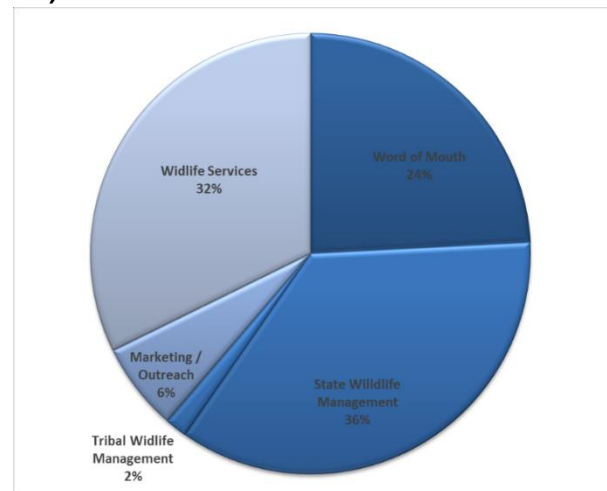
### Program awareness

- In 2021, Wildlife Services was the most commonly cited source of referral to the program, followed by state wildlife managers and word of mouth (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 1: Percentage of fence projects by type of attractant secured (2021)**



**Fig. 2: How participants heard about the program (2021)**



### Participant Survey Highlights

Defenders monitors pre- and post-fencing success related to human-bear conflicts on private lands by annually surveying participants with electric fences in use for one or more years. A larger survey effort is being planned for 2022.

### Of the 145 participants surveyed to date:

- 51% experienced past bear conflicts at their site.
- 94% report their electric fences are still in use.
- 99% report that their fence has successfully protected the intended attractant.
- 3% report experiencing some type of fence failure resulting in a conflict; each failure was attributed to technical difficulties and/or user error.
- 25% have improved or expanded their fences since the time of installation.

### Testimonial from our 500<sup>th</sup> project participant:

*I was pretty worked up when I called and I said, I've got a bear in my apple tree and he's tearing it apart. What are you going to do about it? And he then proceeded to very calmly and very nicely explain, "Well, we can help you with that. We can help you get an electric fence put up. We can help even install it if necessary, and our program pays for half of it. Would you be interested in that?" And we continued to discuss it until I was pretty well diffused and calm and said, okay, let's do this.*

— R.B., Clinton, MT, 2021Participant





**Above: Defenders staff completes a bear-resistant enclosure around a commercial dumpster in Seeley Lake**

**Right: USDA Wildlife Services Personnel working on a youth 4H project on the Blackfeet Reservation, funded in part by Defenders of Wildlife**



**Left: USDA Wildlife Services and the Blackfoot Challenge team up with Defenders and NRDC to complete an electrified goat pen**

**Below: Defenders and USDA Wildlife Services complete an electrified chicken Coop in the Blackfoot Valley**

