

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.

Defenders has a rich history of collaboration with individuals, communities, nonprofit organizations, and state, federal and tribal agencies to complete conflict reduction projects, primarily on private lands. Defenders' electric fence incentive program provides both 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

When Defenders' electric fence incentive program began back in 2010, we reimbursed landowners \$100 of the cost to install an electric fence around an identified grizzly bear attractant. By 2012, we recognized the need for more funding per project, so we increased the reimbursement to 50% of the cost of electric fencing, up to a maximum incentive of \$500 per participant. On a case-by-case basis, the program also contributes to large-scale collaborative projects each year that require greater funding resources. The program is designed to proactively reduce or prevent conflicts, but we attempt to prioritize landowners with existing bear problems. At sites with completed fences that are maintained, we are seeing a direct reduction in human-bear and other wildlife conflicts.

Now in its fourteenth year, the Electric Fence Incentive Program is one of Defenders longest running and most successful coexistence initiatives. The program continues to expand its reach across grizzly habitat,



An electric fencing demonstration for the Methow Bear Council, residents of the Methow Valley and Defenders staff at a project site in Washington's North Cascades Ecosystem. © Defenders of Wildlife

operating within 40 counties across Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and Washington.

The program has assisted with the completion of 713 electric fences (see the spatial and temporal map of all projects completed to date on page 6) and over \$250,000 in reimbursements and financial assistance to participants since its inception.

2024 Results

The program reached another milestone by surpassing 700 completed fences in 2024 with 49 new projects receiving reimbursements and materials contributions totaling \$23,806. Another 46 people contacted the program for electric fencing guidance but did not participate or have not completed a project.

Each year Defenders' staff works to expand the use of conflict prevention tools like electric fencing by providing training opportunities with agency personnel, community groups, and other practitioners. The demonstration project pictured here illustrates our "train the trainer" effort that continues to provide greater capacity and implementation of electric fencing across grizzly bear habitat.



Defenders staff explaining the finer points of electrifying a chicken coop at an electric fencing demonstration project © Defenders of Wildlife

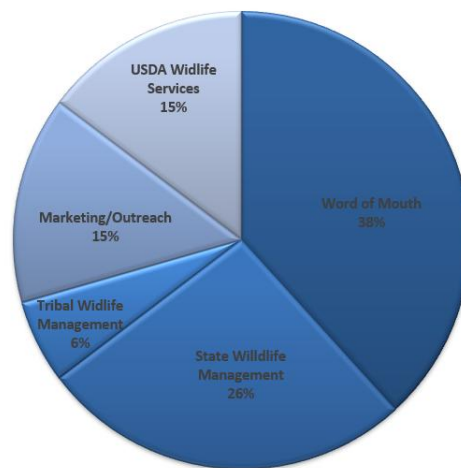
This year's signature demonstration project was with the Methow Bear Council, residents of the Methow Valley, and Defenders staff from three regions at a project site in the North Cascades Ecosystem.

The program relies heavily on our partnerships with agencies and NGOs. And while our collaboration with local, state, and tribal entities is critical, we cannot overstate the significance of our federal agency partners like USDA Wildlife Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies at the table of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. Their involvement is fundamental to the success of our program and of successful grizzly bear conflict

prevention. Our most significant expansion of conflict reduction through electric fencing remains our ongoing partnership with the USDA- APHIS Non-lethal Initiative and Wildlife Services personnel from around the country. In 2024, collaboration with federal agencies and other agencies such as Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Wyoming Game and Fish, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Wildlife Management, and USFWS was responsible for 21 of our 49 projects.

The program also continues to build capacity by supplying temporary electric fencing kits to agencies and NGOs. Defenders provided 3 of these kits in 2024, which can be deployed as loaner fences to immediately address conflicts and provide temporary protection until a more permanent system is installed. The use of these loaner kits by Wildlife Services continues to be very popular with 4H youth along the Rocky Mountain Front that raise livestock for a single year.

Fig. 1: How participants were referred to the program in 2024



Defenders staff conducted 21 site visits and fence installations with participants, including several direct responses to ongoing bear conflicts, as well as outreach events, presentations, and demonstrations. Meanwhile, the *"How to an install electric fence to prevent bear conflicts"* tutorial video we created has quietly reached nearly 60,000 people since 2017.

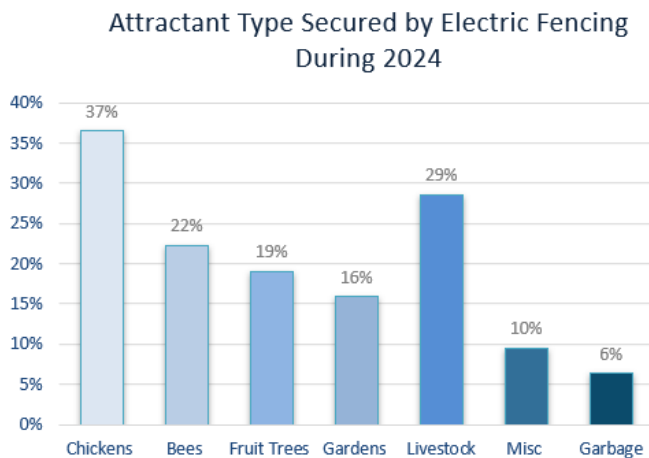
Average reimbursement (2024)

- \$289 per project

Attractants secured

- In 2024, protecting chickens was the top reason participants installed an electric fence, followed by livestock and bees (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Percentage of completed fence projects by type of attractant secured



Fence type (2024)

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

Program awareness

- In 2024, word of mouth was the most commonly cited source of referral to the program, followed by state wildlife managers and USDA Wildlife Services (Fig. 1).

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 our latest survey of 300 past participants, we found 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 2024 participants:

We knew we needed a fence to keep the bears out. They are VERY active in our neighborhood, so thanks for offering this program

-A. S. Potomac, MT

Really appreciated the instructional video and the FWP guide and the helpful information in each of your emails. Thanks!

-K. P. Columbia Falls, MT

The video on installing an electric fence was really helpful. Russ met me at Murdochs to make sure I was purchasing the right equipment, educate me on the project, and loan me some tools. I also appreciated the amount of time he spent with me on the phone talking through the steps of the project. And then he visited our sight to provide feedback and suggestions on ways to make improvements. THANK YOU.

-B. T. Bitterroot Valley, MT

Thank you so much for offering this program. The tutorial video was super helpful. The photos too. I would not have been able to set up such an effective fence if it wasn't for this program.

-K. F. Missoula, MT

I can't thank you guys enough for your work. It was awesome to have your help and I soooooo appreciate it!

-A. L. Florence, MT



Above Left: Wildlife Services and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Wildlife personnel build an electrified night pen © Defenders of Wildlife

Above Center: Defenders staff participate in a bear spray training in Washington © Defenders of Wildlife

Above Right: Connecting the jumper wires between electrified strands of wire around a chicken coop © Defenders of Wildlife

Left: Defenders staff discussing focal areas for conflict prevention areas in the North Cascades © Defenders of Wildlife

Bottom: Bear specialists from Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks hang insulators on an orchard fence on Flathead Lake © Rob G. Green



Photo Credit: Rob G. Green

