

Defenders of Wildlife



Electric Fence Incentive Program (Alaska)

Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to promoting coexistence between bears and humans across the nation through conflict prevention and reduction. Electric fences are a conflict mitigation tool that protects property and allows bears to remain wild. Defenders' Electric Fencing Incentive Program aims to support individuals and communities through financial and technical assistance on fencing projects that secure livestock, garbage, beehives, chicken coops, gardens and many other bear attractants. In Alaska, we equip participants with detailed information regarding the construction and maintenance of electric fences across the Kenai Peninsula and in Southeast Alaska.

In addition to individuals and communities, Defenders collaborates with nonprofit organizations, Tribes, small businesses, local governments, and state and federal agencies to complete electric fence projects and provide other coexistence tools.

Program History

In 2010, Defenders' electric fencing program began in the lower 48 states to aid in long-term grizzly bear recovery by proactively preventing conflicts between bears and humans.

Although Alaskan bear populations are not part of a recovery effort, human-bear coexistence is needed to ensure the future status of brown and black bears and prevent endangerment. In 2019, the Electric Fence Incentive Program became available to Alaskans on the Kenai Peninsula and expanded to Southeast Alaska in 2022. Similarly to the program in the lower 48, we reimburse 50% of the total cost of the electric fence project, up to \$500. Since the start of our program, over 70 electric fence projects have been verified and compensated by Defenders of Wildlife in Alaska.

A new partnership with the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska through the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy has provided increased funding for bear coexistence projects in Southeast Alaska. The long-term goal for the program is to continue expanding to other regions in Alaska and increase electric fence usage where bears and humans live in close proximity.

Results

Our survey involved obtaining information regarding 26 electric fence projects that were completed in Alaska from the beginning of 2020 through the end of 2023, with the assistance of Defenders' program. The reimbursements totaled over \$8,000 to the participants involved. In addition to the fences established, multiple outreach events were

conducted by Defenders to promote the coexistence of bears and humans across Alaska. This included workshops, seminars, and demonstrations in Homer, Soldotna, and other towns across the Kenai Peninsula and southeast Alaska.

Average Fence Cost* (2020 - 2023)

- \$774 per project

*pre reimbursement

Average Defenders Reimbursement Cost (2020 – 2023)

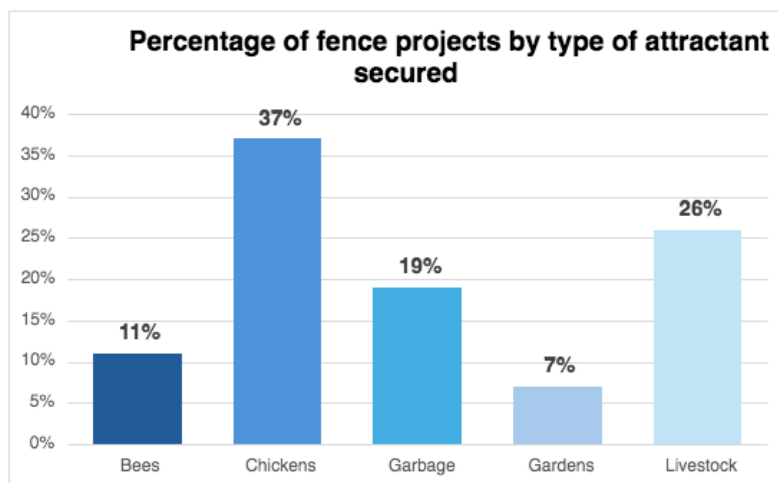
- \$387 per project

Defenders of Wildlife provided \$8,125 in funding to fence projects for survey participants. Defenders also provided a significant level of funding during this period for two orders of bear proof trash containers for the Kenai Peninsula, which resulted in 305 bear proof trash containers being distributed to residents in and around Seward, Alaska.¹

Attractants Secured

- Within our data set, protecting chickens was the top reason why participants installed an electric fence, followed by non-avian livestock and garbage (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1

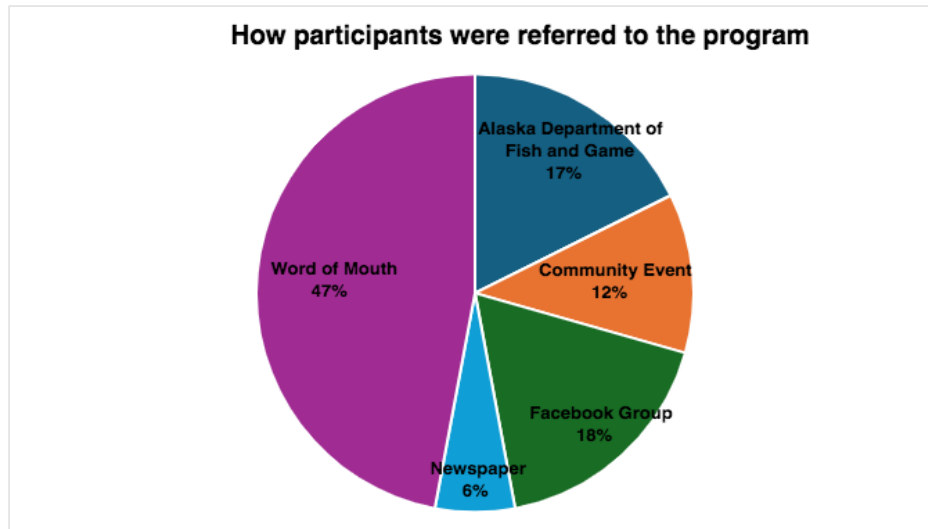


Program Awareness

- Word of mouth was the primary source of referral to the program, followed by Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Facebook Groups (Fig. 2).

¹ The total contribution Defenders' made for the purchase of two orders of bear proof trash containers was \$66,672.73, or over \$30,000 per order.

Fig. 2



Participant Survey Highlights

- 71% experienced bear conflicts or had neighbors who experienced bear conflicts prior to installing a fence.
- 35% have witnessed a bear interacting with the fence and then quickly leaving the property, while the other 65% have not seen bears interact with their fence at all.
- 100% report that they feel that their fence has successfully protected their bear attractant.

Testimonials from participants:

“When we first heard about the program we thought it was too good to be true. We’ve been so thankful we pursued it. It was a seamless process and we were able to afford high quality electric fences to keep both our animals and the bears safe. We’ve told everyone we know with animals about the program!” - H.K., Homer, AK

Authors: Skye Sunderhauf, Nicole Whittington-Evans.

For more information, contact Alaskadefenders@defenders.org or (907) 276-9453.