

Defenders of Wildlife

Electric Fence Incentive Program



Defenders of Wildlife maintains a long-term commitment to grizzly bear recovery throughout the lower 48 states, where human-wildlife conflict remains one of the leading causes of grizzly bear mortality and a challenge to public acceptance of the species. Through the Electric Fencing Incentive Program, Defenders provides financial and technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, beekeepers, and other private landowners to secure livestock, beehives, fruit trees, and other attractants that may draw bears into conflict situations. Program field staff engage directly with landowners and communities across the five recovery ecosystems — the Greater Yellowstone, Northern Continental Divide, Cabinet-Yaak, Selkirk, and Bitterroot — building awareness and implementing conflict reduction tailored to the needs of each region.

Defenders has a longstanding history of collaboration with landowners, communities, nonprofit partners, and state, federal, and Tribal agencies to implement conflict-reduction projects—primarily on private lands where proactive solutions can have the greatest impact. Through the Electric Fence Incentive Program, Defenders provides both financial assistance and hands-on technical expertise to design and construct electric fencing systems that effectively deter grizzly bears and other carnivores from accessing human-related attractants. The combination of funding support and technical guidance delivers conflict reduction on a meaningful scale that benefits both landowners and bears.

Program History

Defenders of Wildlife launched the Electric Fence Incentive Program in 2010 to help landowners reduce attractants that can lead to conflicts with grizzly bears. The program initially provided reimbursements of up to \$100 to support the installation of electric fencing around identified bear attractants.

Recognizing the need for increased financial support to achieve meaningful impact, the program expanded in 2012 to reimburse 50% of eligible electric fencing costs, up to a maximum of \$500 per participant. On a case-by-case basis, the program also contributes funding to larger, collaborative projects that require greater investment and partnership coordination.

While the program is designed to proactively prevent conflicts before they occur, priority is given to



A black bear visits a chicken coop west of Missoula and weighs their options before hopping the fence and grabbing a chicken. The fence was electrified shortly thereafter © Andrew Hunt

landowners experiencing ongoing bear issues. Where fences have been installed and properly maintained, we are seeing measurable reductions in human-bear conflicts, as well as decreases in other wildlife conflicts.

Now in its fifteenth year, the Electric Fence Incentive Program stands as one of Defenders' longest running and most successful coexistence initiatives. The program continues to expand across grizzly habitat and currently operates in 40 counties throughout Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and Washington.

Since its inception, the program has supported the installation of 767 electric fences (see the spatial and temporal project map on page 5) and has provided more than \$270,000 in reimbursements and financial assistance to participating landowners.

2025 At A Glance

Over the past fifteen years—and through hundreds of electric fence installations—Defenders has established itself as a leader in human-bear conflict reduction across the Northern Rockies.

During the 2025 field season, the program supported 54 new electric fencing projects, providing \$23,011 in reimbursements and materials assistance to participating landowners. An additional 35 individuals contacted the program seeking technical guidance, reflecting continued demand for conflict-prevention and proactive measures.



Defenders staff and Blackfoot Challenge staff complete a fence project with a livestock producer in the Blackfoot River Watershed © Defenders of Wildlife

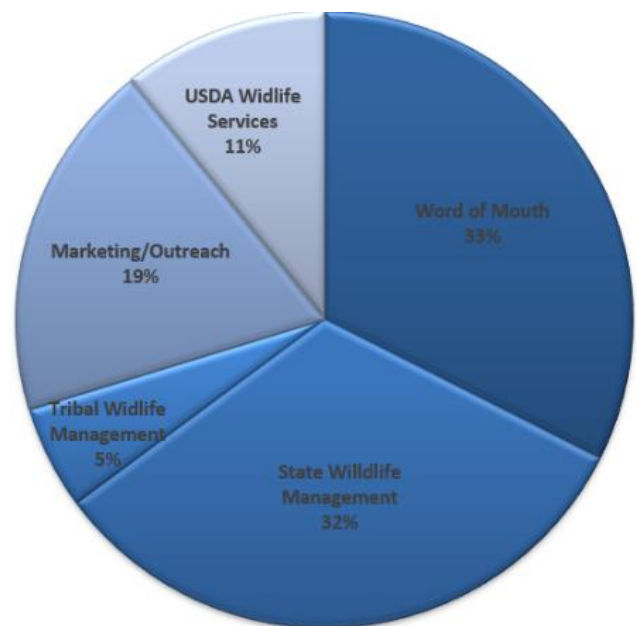
Each year, Defenders works to expand the effective use of electric fencing by offering training opportunities to agency personnel, community groups, and conservation practitioners. In 2025, our “train-the-trainer” efforts focused on staff from Defenders’ Northwest Region at a demonstration site outside Missoula, Montana. In partnership with the landowner, staff constructed an electric fence system protecting both a garden and apiary (see the photo on page 4)—providing hands-on instruction that strengthens our internal capacity and enhances regional expertise.

Collaboration remains fundamental to the program’s success and to effective grizzly bear conflict prevention more broadly. In 2025, referrals from USDA Wildlife Services, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Wildlife Management Program, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service accounted for nearly half of all completed projects. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and USDA Wildlife Services continue to be among our most consistent and impactful partners.

Defenders also maintains a close partnership with the Blackfoot Challenge as it advances large-scale conflict reduction efforts throughout the Blackfoot Watershed. This year, Defenders contributed \$10,000 to support the installation of eight electric fences protecting commercial livestock operations with documented histories of grizzly bear conflicts.

Together, these partnerships amplify our impact—reducing preventable conflicts, strengthening local capacity, and building durable coexistence across shared landscapes.

Fig. 1: How participants were referred to the program in 2025



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 over 62,000 people since 2017.

Average reimbursement (2025)

- \$289 per project

Attractants secured

- In 2025, chickens were the top reason participants installed an electric fence again this year, followed by livestock, fruit trees, and bees (Fig. 2).

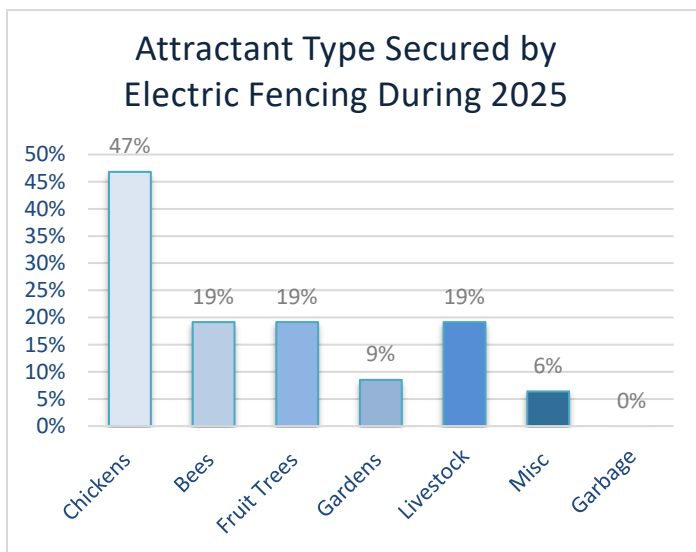


Fig. 2: Percentage of completed fence projects by type of attractant secured Fence type (2025)

- 59% of participants built permanent fences.
- 11% of participants built semi-permanent fences.
- 30% of participants built temporary fences.
- Portable netting fence usage has skyrocketed with a 4x increase from 2024

Program awareness

- In 2025, word of mouth was the most commonly cited source of referral to the program, followed

by state wildlife managers and marketing and outreach (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 having no depredations or conflicts since installing an electric fence.
- 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 2025 participants:

"I received the check from Defenders. I believe this support of landowners who might be directly impacted by grizzly bears is an important part of keeping bears out of trouble. Thank you for your work. I also want to pass on a compliment from one of our bee club members concerning your presentation on bear fences and bear behavior."

"Thank you so much for helping me to make the electric fencing around my chicken yard a reality...I just wanted to thank you & to let you know your work matters."

"Super appreciative of everything this program does. A+ education. Thank you so much to you and the whole DOW organization. You all make is so much easier to do the right thing."



Above Left: Defenders of Wildlife, USDA Wildlife Services, and Blackfoot Challenge personnel and interns complete an electrified pasture fenceline with a livestock producer © Blackfoot Challenge



Above Right: A resident of the Bitterroot Valley tests her newly installed electric fence around her fruit trees, completed by Defenders and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks © Defenders of Wildlife

Bottom Left: Defenders staff and a landowner complete a demonstration project fence along the Blackfoot River © Defenders of Wildlife

Bottom Right: A newly installed cattle pasture fence on the Flathead Indian Reservation, by Defenders, USDA Wildlife Services, and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes © Defenders of Wildlife



