

# MISSOULA LAGGING, BUT FUNDING FOR BEAR-SMART PROJECTS AVAILABLE

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(Missoula Current) Missoula is lagging other Montana communities in becoming more bear-smart, but it may be able to benefit from new funding for communities wanting to prevent human-bear conflict.

Last week, Bozeman-based People and Carnivores announced that it has created a Bear Smart Community Resource Fund for towns in western Montana, central or northern Idaho and the Greater Yellowstone region that need money for bear-smart improvements or consulting and support for groups wanting to develop projects that reduce human-bear conflict.

The \$50,000 available for 2023 is provided by the Volgenau Foundation, a [Virginia-based foundation](#) that promotes environmental conservation.

In 2020, the Governor's Grizzly Bear Advisory Council released a final report, which included close to 40 recommendations on what Montana needed to successfully manage grizzly bears. Most importantly, the council recognized that new funding was required "from diverse entities and sources. Resources are key to the success of all our recommendations."

Good management costs money, from bear-resistant trash receptacles to public education on best practices. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks needs more bear biologists and resources to manage people as well as bears, especially as grizzly bears attempt to develop migration routes between protected recovery areas.

That's where People and Carnivores, Defenders of Wildlife and other organizations have tried to help. In the past, they've donated or partially financed tools like electrical fences for beehives and chicken coops or services such as installing bear hangs in camping areas.

Last year, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee endorsed a Bear Smart Community program to support and provide a framework for communities to create local bear conflict prevention programs. This new funding helps get that program going, said People and Carnivores executive director Lisa Upson.

"Both grizzlies and black bears are moving around a lot, and we've seen an influx of people and increasing development in the region. Local residents and businesses working together can make prevention tools effective on a community scale, which helps everyone as well as bears," Upson said.

Officials and residents in Virginia City worked with People and Carnivores to become a Bear Smart Community a year ago.

"We took steps over time that have added up to make a huge impact for our community, like getting bear-resistant garbage cans in town and at campgrounds, a fruit gleaning program, and educating people about bears being nearby" said Virginia City Mayor Justin Gatewood. "We used to have frequent black bear issues, but we've had none since doing all this. Now we're working to maintain that trend, and I think we're moving in the right direction."

The County and City of Missoula adopted a [Bear Smart resolution](#) in October, but the city has a lot further to go before it's at the same level in conflict prevention as Virginia City or Whitefish. Towns in the Bitterroot and Swan valleys also need to make changes to prevent human-bear conflict. This funding might help move them forward.

People and Carnivores will prioritize the applications based on the extent that bear conflict prevention is integrated across a community. A project has to go beyond just buying bear-proof containers or hazing. The project should be widely supported and sustainable.

There is no dollar limit for projects. Additional money may be available in 2024 and 2025.

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