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EDITOR'S PICK TOPICAL ALERT TOP STORY

Nonprofit offers money for communities to go Bear Smart

Joshua Murdock

Jan 30, 2023



When Virginia City decided to go "bear smart," nonprofit People and Carnivores helped design bear-resistant garbage bins with a rustic look.

Courtesy People and Carnivores

Joshua Murdock

Communities in western Montana, northern Idaho and around Yellowstone looking to go Bear Smart in 2023 and beyond can now apply for money from a new fund aimed specifically at helping to jump-start or implement community plans

to reduce conflicts between humans and bears.

The Bear Smart Community Resource Fund, announced Thursday by Montana nonprofit People and Carnivores, offers up a total of \$50,000 in 2023 for the myriad tasks that face communities hoping to develop a Bear Smart program. People and Carnivores is also offering funding to recipients for consulting and support services from field staff, and educational materials. The fund is supported by The Volgenau Foundation and may be extended into 2024 and 2025.



A bear in Colorado may now have the record for most selfies ever taken. The big guy triggered more than 400 photos of himself after discovering a wildlife camera in Boulder.

The funding is aimed at supporting activities that include organizing a committee to start a Bear Smart program; creating and distributing educational materials; holding educational events; conducting bear-conflict hazard assessments; creating a prevention plan; and purchasing and implementing bear-resistant or deterrent equipment. The nonprofit stated Thursday that “community representatives and local officials can apply for resources on behalf of their municipality, neighborhood network, or other locale in which people live near bears.” The funds are not intended

for individual projects that aren't part of a community-level plan, or for monitoring, research, hazing or loss compensation, according to a request for proposals the nonprofit released.

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

Information on how to apply is available at

peopleandcarnivores.org/bearresources. People and Carnivores works with property owners, tribal and local governments, and community groups throughout the Northern Rockies to reduce conflict between humans and predators like wolves, bears and mountain lions.

The group highlighted Virginia City, the first municipality in Montana to develop a program under the Bear Smart program originally developed in British Columbia. In Thursday’s announcement from People and Carnivores, Virginia City Mayor Justin Gatewood said, “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. 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."

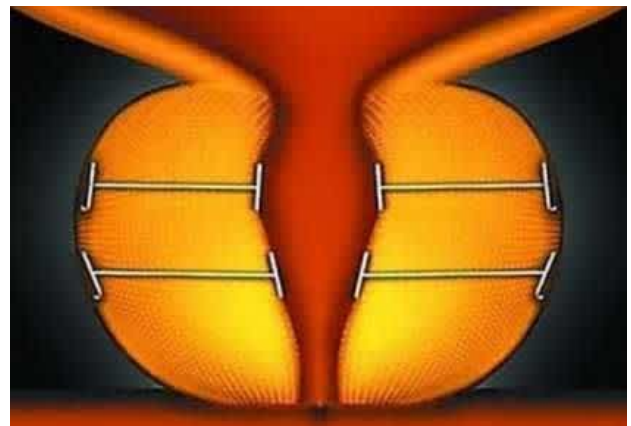
Since Virginia City's efforts in recent years, other places like Whitefish and Missoula City and County have also developed and begun to implement Bear Smart programs and other initiatives. The summer and fall of 2022 brought a particularly harrowing bear-conflict season to Montana, as a **food failure statewide drove famished bears** (mostly black bears) into human environs with greater frequency and depth than many bear managers had ever observed. **Missoula City and County adopted a joint resolution** in the fall that formally incorporated Bear Smart recommendations into statute. Smaller **communities in the surrounding area** are in the beginning stages of exploring their own Bear Smart efforts.

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