

Status of the Pitkin County Landfill
July 16, 2025

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Colorado Bear Coalition



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Pitkin County Landfill Status July 15, 2025

Summary

Bears have been feeding in the Pitkin County landfill for decades. Research gathered by the Colorado Bear Coalition (CBC) shows that electric fences are very effective at keeping black bears (and grizzly bears) out of landfills. (See reports and case studies below under the examples of success section.) CBC recommends that planning and financing of permanent electric fence be included in the development of the new Pitkin County landfill that will be opened in four years. The approximate cost for this fencing is roughly \$1 million, according to local media. An effective, semi-permanent electric fence could likely be installed around the active cells at the current landfill for less than \$10,000, according to an expert in electric fencing as deterrents for bears, although a site visit is needed to be certain. Pitkin County commissioners have no plans to install a semi-permanent fence at the current landfill and have made no commitment to install a permanent electric fence at the future landfill. The purpose of this report is to provide information on why electric fencing should be considered as a solution, both in the immediate and long-term future. Colorado lags other parts of North America regarding preventing bears from feeding at landfills. Pitkin County landfill could become the model for the state of Colorado. A pilot study to investigate whether a gradual reduction in access to the landfill over time encourages totally dependent bears to look for native food, could be conducted at the existing landfill.



A black bear rummages through the recycling pile at the Pitkin County Solid Waste Center.
Photo courtesy of the Aspen Times Feb. 16, 2024

Background

An [Aug. 14, 2013, Aspen Times article, “Pitkin County mulls fencing bears out from landfill”](#) quotes the Pitkin Board of County Commissioners and CPW about the cost of fencing the landfill and problems associated with relocating bears.

Eleven years later, after not fencing in the landfill or taking other action required by humans who choose to live in bear country, the [Feb. 16, 2024 Aspen Times article, “Can anything be done about the b-b-big b-b-bear problem at the landfill?”](#)

Update since June 12

In April, CBC planned a meeting at the Pitkin County Landfill for Monday, **June 16**, with CPW (AWM Matt Yamashita, Assistant AWM John Groves, and DWM Kurtis Tesch), Pitkin County commissioners, Pitkin County Sheriff Deputy Emily Casebeer, and Snowmass Code Enforcement Lauren Martenson, but **on June 9**, Pitkin County Public Works Director Brian Pettet canceled the meeting, explaining that Mondays are busy days at the landfill and that he would schedule a meeting with all these parties to be held in town (not at the landfill) on July 1 or July 8.

On July 1, the Pitkin County Commissioners met with CPW’s Matt Yamashita, John Groves, and Kurtis Tesch. Pitkin County Commissioners include Chair Kelly McNicholas Kury, Patti Clapper, Jeffrey Woodruff, Francie Jacober, and Greg Poschman. A recording of the meeting is [here](#). CPW expressed skepticism that electric fencing would be effective at keeping bears out of the landfill. The county commissioners have revealed no plans to install electric fencing around the current landfill. More detailed notes of the July 1 Pitkin County BOCC meeting with CPW are in the appendix.

On July 9, Brian Pettet, the county’s public works director, sent an email to CBC stating that Pitkin County has no intention of installing electric fencing its current landfill.

Email July 9, 2025

Melinda,

The County is not pursuing wildlife fencing bids for the Solid Waste Center (SWC) at this time. CPW mentioned that the Landfill represents only 5-10% of bear issues in Pitkin County and CPW officials expressed concerns about the efficacy of an electrified wildlife fence at the Landfill.

Additionally, the extensive landfill expansion and facility redevelopment project is underway. In addition to being an active Solid Waste Center, the site is experiencing earthwork for this large scale facility relocation project. Given feedback from the BOCC/CPW joint meeting, the timing for wildlife fence consideration would be after the project is complete and new access roads and relocated SWC operations are in place.

Given these factors, any meeting about bears at the landfill will be delayed until a later date.

Brian Pettet
Director of Public Works
Pitkin County
76 Service Center Road
Aspen, CO 81611
970-920-5392

Discussion and Conclusion

Pitkin County has decided not to install electric fencing of the active cells at the current landfill, and it has not committed to installing electric fencing at its new facility. The reasoning seems to be that, since CPW thinks the landfill constitutes 5% -10% of the problem attractants, the resources to fix the landfill problem are not justified, since the effort would not reduce the other attractants in the county. The landfill is likely a greater source of attractants than any other single source in Pitkin County. Failure to address the situation exhibits a double standard, given that residents and businesses are required not to attract bears. Worse, it's unfair to bears. Bears that can access anthropogenic foods in landfills associate rich foods with human activity and are therefore more likely to be killed due to CPW's two-strike policy, as well as by being killed by cars. Data that CPW maintains showing the location of vehicular collisions with wildlife indicate that the close proximity of the landfill to the highway draws bears toward Highway 82, resulting in bear deaths by vehicular collisions. These data will be presented in a future report.

Examples of Successful Deterrents of Bears with Electric Fencing

In Canada and Alaska

"Bear Smart" Community Program: Background Report, 2002, Prepared for B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. Case studies at Whistler, Revelstoke, and MacKenzie:

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/plants-animals-and-ecosystems/conservation-officer-service/bearsmart_bkgdr.pdf

This 2023 report from the Revelstoke landfill shows reports that it's working and keeping bears out:

<https://www.csr.bc.ca/DocumentCenter/View/4546/2023-Revelstoke-Landfill-Annual-Report-PDF?bidId=>

Kelowna newspaper reports that the number of bears killed in Revelstoke dropped after Revelstoke landfill installed electric fence in 1994:

<https://www.kelownacapnews.com/news/saving-bears-revelstokes-garbage-dilemma-3205236>

A 2025 newspaper report says Revelstoke is spending \$120,000 to replace aging electric fence around landfill.

<https://www.revelstokereview.com/local-news/rural-revelstoke-makes-up-cost-for-new-electric-fencing-at-landfill-8094144>

Report on efficacy of electric fence around Norman Wells (Northwest Territories) landfill:

https://www.gov.nt.ca/ecc/sites/ecc/files/69_manuscript.pdf

News report on broken electric fence around landfill in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, draws threat from government to cite landfill for intentionally feeding bears:

<https://cabinradio.ca/194356/news/environment/wildlife/broken-fence-makes-dump-bears-a-live-issue-in-fort-smith/>

Alberta government recommendation about specifications for electric fences around landfills to deter bears:

<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/fc878d50-8751-43c9-a231-6ac27975e160/resource/c1b6255b-47c7-44f8-81de-fbadaf2df272/download/managewastefaciliitiesbearswildlife-2011.pdf>

Chilliwack, B.C., government fines landfill \$11k for non-functioning electric fence around landfill:

<https://www.theprogress.com/local-news/city-of-chilliwack-fined-over-disabled-bear-fence-at-landfill-7372548>

Chilkat Valley News. (2012, November 29). Electric fence planned at landfill.

<https://www.chilkatvalleynews.com/2012/11/29/electric-fence-planned-at-landfill/>

Yukon News. (2024, July 10). Inuvik continues plans to establish bear fence after three destroyed.

<https://www.yukon-news.com/news/inuvik-continues-plans-to-establish-bear-fence-after-three-destroyed-8104345>

Electric Fencing is an Effective Tool for Excluding Black Bears from Landfills in Canada and Alaska

As detailed above, multiple case studies and operational reports from across British Columbia and the Northwest Territories consistently demonstrate that properly installed and maintained electric fencing is a highly effective method for keeping black bears (and grizzly bears) out of landfills. The foundational 1993 study from Norman Wells, NWT, documented near-total elimination of bear visits after electric fencing was installed (Latour & Hagen, 1993). In British Columbia, the Bear Smart Community Program encourages fencing as a critical infrastructure component in reducing bear attractants and promoting human–bear coexistence (Davis et al., 2002). The Revelstoke landfill, which has invested in electrified fencing and plans to upgrade aging perimeter systems, has seen a reduction in bear intrusions even as waste volumes increase (Van Nostrand, 2024; Brouwer, 2025). However, lapses in fence maintenance can quickly reverse progress. In Fort Smith, a broken fence led to renewed bear entry and killing of a bear, prompting immediate commitments to redesign and fully electrify the dump site (Cabin Radio, 2024). Similarly, the City of Chilliwack was fined after temporarily disabling its electric fence, resulting in increased bear access and regulatory penalties (Feinberg, 2024). These examples clearly support the conclusion that electric fencing works—*if and only if* it is well-maintained and continuously powered.

Communities across North America are increasingly turning to electric fencing as a preventative measure to address ongoing bear access at landfill sites. In Inuvik, Northwest Territories, local officials are moving forward with plans to install a bear-resistant electric fence around the town landfill after three bears were killed in 2024 due to persistent scavenging behavior (Yukon News, 2024). The town’s senior administrative officer noted that the decision was driven by a desire to reduce lethal bear management outcomes and foster coexistence, echoing approaches taken by other jurisdictions. Similarly, in Chilkat Valley, Alaska, plans were initiated in 2012 to install an electric fence around the Haines landfill following numerous reports of bears foraging in garbage (Chilkat Valley News, 2012). Officials cited both the high frequency of bear activity and the need to comply with Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation requirements as motivations for the fencing project. These examples reflect a growing recognition across the North that electric fencing is a viable, humane, and increasingly necessary solution to prevent bears from becoming food-conditioned at waste facilities.

Case Studies from the “Bear Smart” Community Program: Background Report, 2002

“The following case histories examine three communities in British Columbia and one in Alberta that have implemented programs to reduce the occurrence of “problem” bear behaviour. The three British Columbia communities were originally profiled in Ciarniello (1997). Each of the towns profiled in the case histories had slightly different human-bear conflict issues to deal with because different bear species used their landfills and towns. **Whistler** had problems with black bears, **Mackenzie** had mainly grizzly bear problems, **Revelstoke** experienced both black bear and grizzly bear problems. These case studies were chosen based on their applicability to management problems experienced in other areas of the province. ... The first step that each community took was to install an electric fence around their respective landfills.” P. 57

Whistler, B.C.

An electric fence was installed around the landfill in 1995. An increase in bears within town after the installation of the electric fence was not reported. But bears initially found ways in by digging, climbing, and exploiting weak points. In response, stronger barriers were added, including buried fencing, concrete, and automated gates. By 1999, the entire landfill was secured, and bear access dropped to near zero. As a result, bears shifted back to natural food sources nearby. See Figure 2. P.62

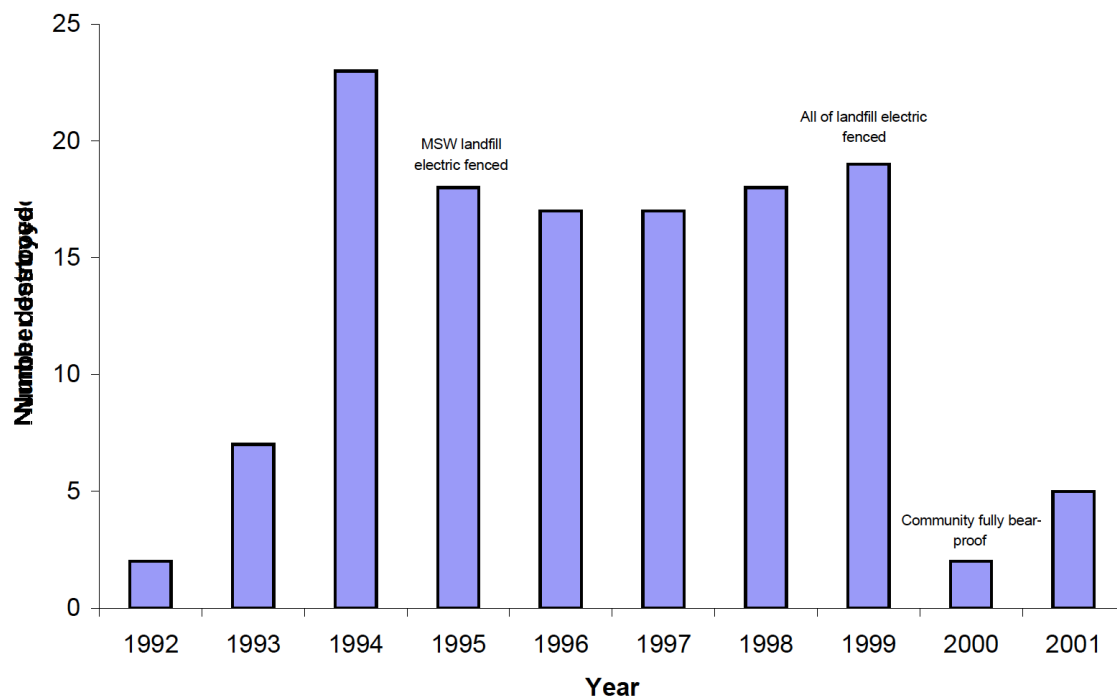


Figure 2. Number of black bears destroyed in Whistler, BC 1992-2001. Note: graph shows bears destroyed for the entire Whistler area, not just the town site of Whistler.

Revelstoke, B.C.

“The town of Revelstoke has been working toward becoming bear-proof since 1994 when its landfill was electric fenced. Revelstoke has been very successful in becoming more “Bear Smart” by implementing an intensive education program and by managing attractants within the community. Through these efforts, Revelstoke has experienced a significant decline in the need for management actions (Fig. 3), reducing the number of bears destroyed or removed from 62 (33 destroyed, 29 relocated) in 1994 to just two in 2000 and 2001 (Couturier 2002). Pg. 70-71.

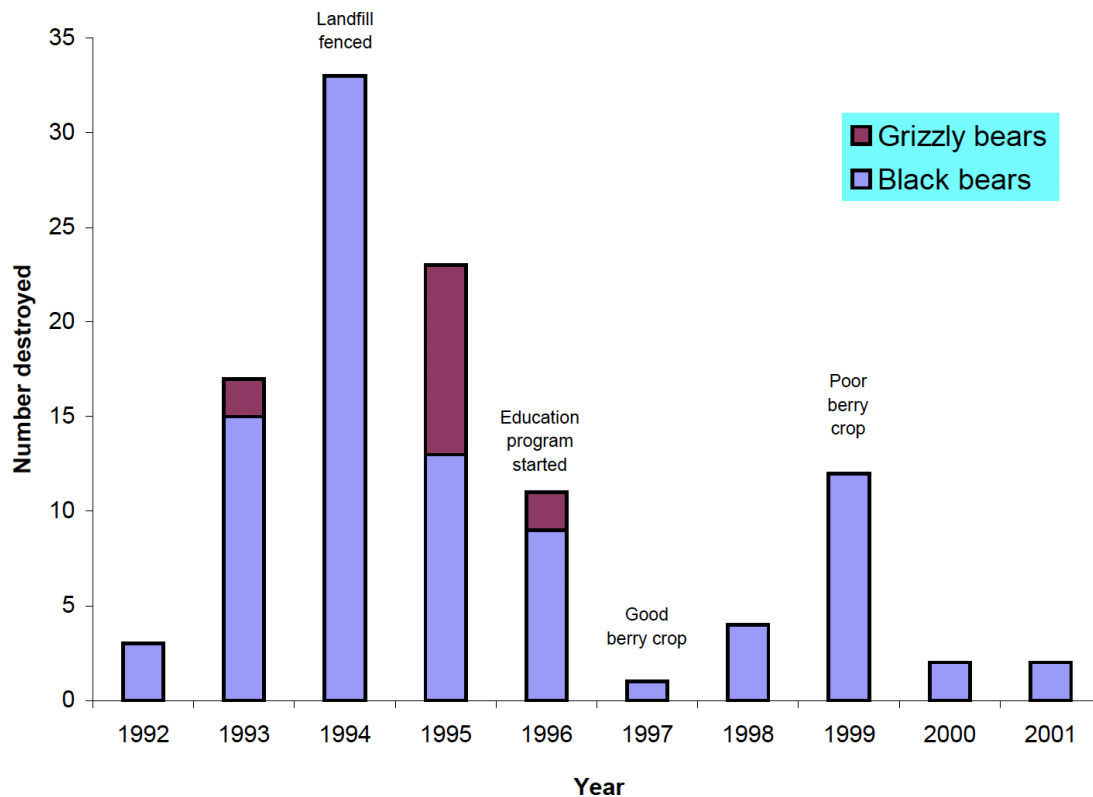


Figure 3. Number of bears destroyed in the community of Revelstoke, 1992-2001.

MacKenzie, B.C.

“Mackenzie is an example of the necessity of having a well-rounded and thorough strategy for dealing with “problem” bears prior to electric fencing of landfills. The town electric fenced its landfill (in 1995) but has not satisfied any other “Bear Smart” criteria in conjunction with this activity. Because of this, the number of bears destroyed has not declined as much as desired (Fig. 4). In 1997, one grizzly was destroyed in the town site and two were relocated. In 1999, one grizzly was destroyed in the town site and seven were relocated from the town site. Encouragingly, in 1996, 1998, and 2000 no grizzly bears had to be destroyed or relocated from the town site.” This case study shows that it is necessary to install electric fencing around a local landfill and remove other attractants (e.g., bird feeders, livestock and pet food, etc.) in order not to attract bears into areas of human development.

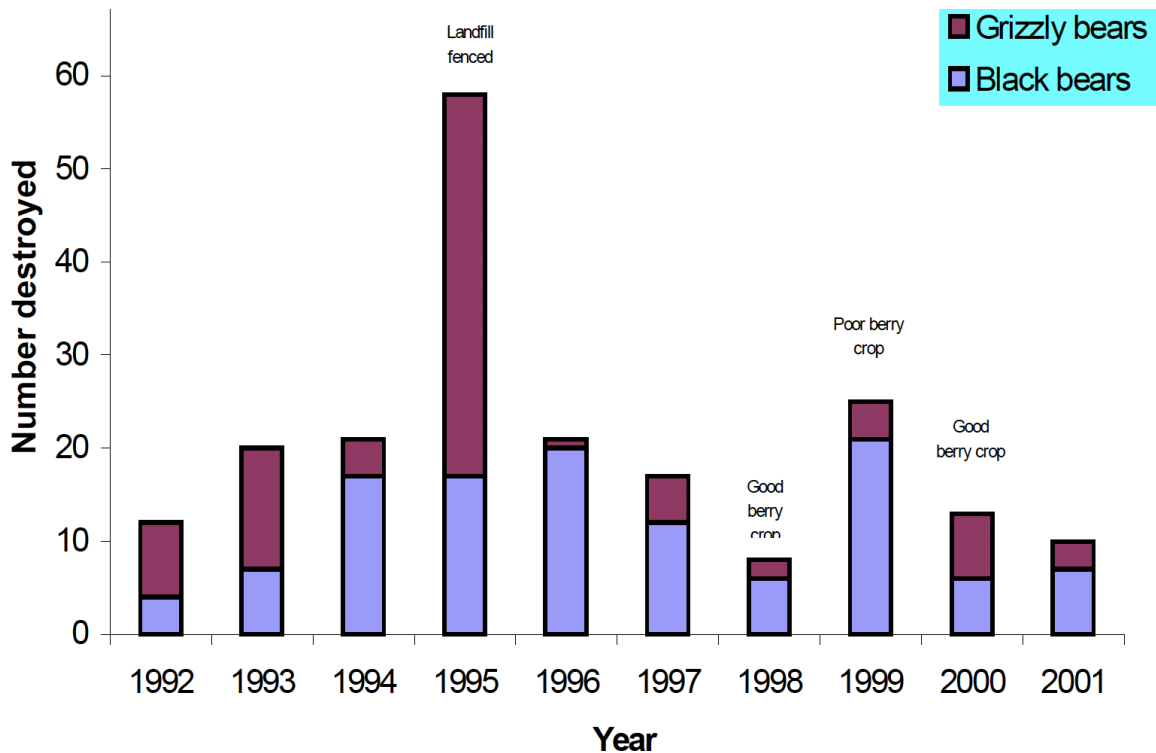


Figure 4. Numbers of bears destroyed in the Mackenzie District, 1992-2001.
Note: graph shows bears destroyed for the entire district of Mackenzie, not just the town site of Mackenzie.

Transfer stations in Montana

Flathead County successfully keeps black bears and grizzly bears out of its transfer stations (container sites) where residents drop off waste and recyclables. See the appendix for a recent email exchange and photo.

Landfills in Colorado

CBC is unaware of landfills in Colorado with electric fencing although this information should be available from CPW, as it keeps records of bear conflict and should be able to correlate this information with landfills. Colorado lags other parts of North America regarding preventing bears from feeding at landfills, thus CBC recommends that Colorado take proactive steps to secure landfills from bears. Canada has successfully kept bears out of landfills for decades. Pitkin County landfill could become the model for the state of Colorado. CBC recommends installing a semi-permanent electric fence around its existing landfill and installing a permanent electric fence around its future landfill. A pilot study investigating whether a gradual reduction in access to the landfill over time encourages totally dependent bears to look for native food could be conducted at the existing landfill.

A vast number of landfills in Colorado are in black-bear habitat (range). See Figure 5. CBC has submitted a CORA request to CPW for all bear incident reports at any landfill or transfer station in Colorado from Jan. 1, 2019 - July 10, 2025.

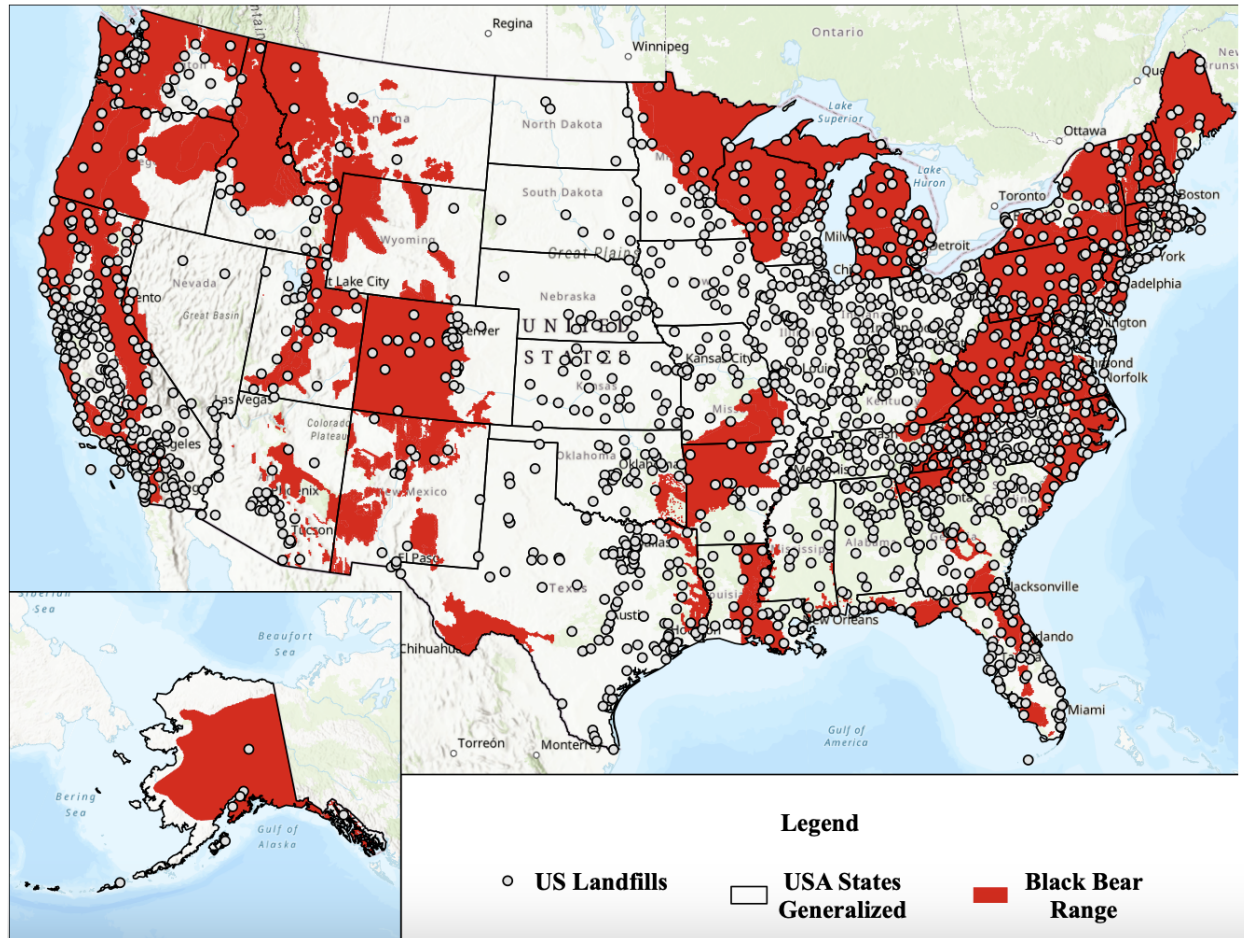


Figure 5. This map shows where black bears still survive in the United States (black bear range, in red) and the location of landfills (black circles filled with white). Note the significant overlap of landfills in black bear range. Map courtesy of Aidan Hallsworth, Colorado State University.

Dispelling the myth that bears that have foraged on human foods won't revert to natural foods

Relevant studies by Breck and Johnson in Aspen and Durango (see references below) found that bears that forage on human foods during poor natural food years often switch back to natural foods when they are available (dispelling the idea that “once a problem bear, always a problem bear”). Indeed, during poor natural food years “wild” bears in both Aspen and Durango would travel several miles to consume human foods, and subsequently went back to consuming natural forage.

August 2024 CBC sent a letter to Pitkin County Commissioners. Among other content, CBC made three requests:

1. Do not approve the expansion of the Pitkin County Landfill without requiring the installation of electric fencing to keep bears out.
2. Obtain proper bids from three fencing experts to determine the true cost of installing and maintaining electric fencing around the landfill.
3. Demonstrate to the citizens of Pitkin County that you prioritize the safety of both humans and bears by mandating electric fencing at the landfill.

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Appendix

Notes from the July 1 Pitkin BOCC Meeting (Recording [here](#)). CBC added **personal comments and questions in red**.

1. Commissioner Jacober said she wants the decision on bears and the landfill to be based on science. Public Works Director Brian Pettit (public works) told her yesterday that there have been many bears at the landfill in recent years, but few to no bears this year. The number of bears at the landfill is inversely proportional to the quantity of natural foods (which is based on the weather).

2. AWM Yamashita said we've been talking about the landfill for years. This is not the only landfill with bears. Pitkin County has more bears than other counties. It's now hot and dry. Without rains, it will be a rough summer and fall for bears.

3. AWM Yamashita said, "an outside group, Colorado Bear Coalition, and its personalities, are looking at our landfill and mentioned it to the CPW commissioners three times since March." CBC suggested electric fencing around the landfill facility, but it's not in CPW's authority to tell Pitkin County what to do. CPW's role is to help the county make informed decisions. Electric fencing is a reasonable solution to some problems. CPW provides electric fencing to apiaries. Caveats: 1) upfront expense and 2) maintenance is required. If beekeepers don't remove trash and grass from electric fencing, it gets grounded out. Bears learn ways around fencing. Electric fencing is not a silver bullet in perpetuity. Needs to be maintained. Bears will break through electric fencing. They tear holes into garage walls. Even electric fencing may not keep bears out. Maybe some good things there. A combination is needed. Some may be a fence; some may be best practices.

4. AWM Yamashita said that CPW recognizes that the landfill is part of the story but that other factors matter, too. The landfill is not the only thing that needs to be addressed. Other conflicts in the county, too. Other corridors: residential and commercial and restaurant trash. Bird feeders, fruit trees, and unsecured trash — must focus on these, too.

5. AWM Yamashita said CPW is a subject-matter expert for the Pitkin County commissioners. Lean on us. We'll be productive with you.

6. Commissioner Clapper asked if CPW knows how many bears are in the valley and suburban area. She is not seeing signs of bears now but did earlier. AWM Yamashita said there are "a ton of bears." CPW monitors at the population scale. Does not look at only the population in the county, but in all of the Roaring Fork Valley and Eagle Valley. CPW does not have clear counts like it has for deer. CPW monitors human-bear conflicts.

7. AWM Yamashita mentioned that hunters show CPW the bears they kill. CPW checks the bears' bodies' conditions, male v female, etc. Colorado bear population may be on a cusp of decreasing, Look at 3- to 5-year trends. We're starting to see population stabilizing and maybe

reducing. Human-bear conflict data show “lots of cubs. See lots of triplets and quadruplets. Science says that’s not possible.” We see this in years with bad natural food. They shouldn’t be able to have triplets and quadruplets. [Johnson, Lewis, and Breck, 2020, pg. 8-9, show that it is not uncommon for black bears in Colorado to have triplets.] They’re finding adequate food. Therefore, there’s more than adequate population. Habitat does not quantify or qualify human sources of food. Bears use humans as a crutch to survive. A general answer, some indices, indicate the population is stabilizing, so we’re decreasing hunting licenses, through field observations and very healthy bear populations.

8. Commissioner Poschman said he heard AWM Yamashita say that electric fences are not a magic bullet. There are other solutions. [There are no other solutions in the literature or according to experts, besides human presence 24 hours per day, seven days per week, with hazing when needed.] We won’t fence the current landfill, so we have time to figure this out.

9. Commissioner Poschman asked if this is a problem worth solving. Is what’s happening OK? You (CPW) don’t seem to be looking for solutions. It’s inappropriate to say that someone else has solved this problem. AWM Yamashita replied that he asked the Colorado Bear Coalition for other landfills (of 60 landfills) that have succeeded in keeping bears out. There are none, he said. Need to look at surrounding communities. We could make a landfill bulletproof, but if you’re not addressing other attractants, you won’t solve the problem. Yes, there’s a problem at the landfill. When it closes for business, look how many bears come to it. One size won’t fit all. Suite of options. Must be adaptable. Can’t say that if you do these three things, you will solve the problem.

10. Commissioner Poschman asked whether elk at the landfill are a problem. Assistant AWM Groves (CPW) said the elk are an attractive nuisance. Not ideal. Why not eat food and lie in warm compost?

11. Commissioner Poschman asked, “Are we OK with this?” AWM Yamashita said, “I don’t know. Are we?” It’s like deer on a golf course. We might not be OK with it. What are our priorities?

12. Commissioner Jacober said that CPW Commissioner Jacober said elk and electric fencing are not a good combination. AWM Yamashita said it depends on the type of fence. Elk run through and ruin one type of fence. But if it’s a hot-wire chain link fence, elk are less likely to disturb it. Animals with antlers will rub fence with strands. Antlers get tangled and are another nuisance for CPW.

13. Commissioner Jacober said, “Don’t we want to have bears around? Bears are an important part of our ecology.”

14. Assistant AWM Groves said the landfill is 5%-10% of the problem. Just a concentration area. If fence the bears out, they will go somewhere else.

15. Commissioner Jacober asked if there's enough habitat for bears if we fence them out of the landfill. John said there's enough habitat. Choke cherries and mass bushes — plenty in this valley. Matt said the habitat has decreased recently because of drought in the last 10 years. This may be why the number of bears is decreasing.

16. Commissioner Clapper wants CPW to share ideas and solutions. Education is needed. Short-term renters need to be reminded to secure trash and remove bird feeders. "When we have to put a bear down, it's a human's fault."

17. Commissioner Chair McNicholas Kury suggested testing ideas and best practices and find out what works at other landfills.

18. Commissioner Jacober asked if we'd have to fence the entire landfill, even building materials area. Maybe this is something we could test.

19. Commissioner Poschman asked if there are solutions at other landfills in Colorado, Oregon, and other states. Matt said he does not know. He said no landfill had zero bear issues. [That's a significant statement. This statement is contradicted by reports from other landfills cited in this document.] Outside the state; he hasn't heard about. Would be interesting to look into.

This discussion ended at 1:51 pm.

Flathead County successfully keeps bears out of transfer stations (container sites) with electric fencing.

On Jul 8, 2025, at 1:11 PM, David Prunty <dprunty@flathead.mt.gov> wrote:

Hi Melinda:

I can only speak for our landfill and container sites. I don't know of other facilities in MT that may be using it. MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) has told others in our part of MT that our design is very effective. We do NOT have electric fence surrounding our landfill. We are about 300 acres so that would be pretty difficult, and we haven't ever had an issue at the landfill that I'm aware of. We did many years ago have a grizzly trapped by FWP immediately adjacent to the landfill that was eating apples in a subdiv next door, but we never saw any evidence that it was in the landfill. We have a six-foot chain-link fence that surrounds most of the landfill. I hope to have it completely surrounded with that fence material in the next year or so.

Our container sites are smaller (up to three acres or so) drop off location located strategically around Flathead County for residents to drop off wastes and recyclables. Some are in bear (grizzly and black) country. This is where our five-strand electric fence has shined. To our knowledge it has never failed, and I've been told stories (never got to witness myself yet) that a Yogi puts their nose on it and they let out a deep guttural bellow, turn tail, and take off. The electric fence is located about four feet outside of a six-foot chain-link fence. We did learn that we needed to keep on top of the grass growing up and shorting out the electric fence, so we use a lot of Roundup in the summer to make sure that doesn't

happen. You must electrify the gate also and this is done with flexible electric fence materials, and you need to be careful when opening/closing so an employee doesn't get zapped. So far, we haven't had any issues with employees or customers complaining about inadvertent electrocution, but you need to mark the fence heavily with signs that it is an electric fence.

All-in-all this design has solved our bear issues at the container sites. FWP touts our system as a great way to go, and we have yet (fingers are always crossed when grizzly bears are involved) to have it fail in about 20 years of service at a site near Glacier National Park and our others around the County.

Hope that helps....

David Prunty
Public Works Director
Flathead County
Road and Bridge 406-758-5790
Solid Waste 406-758-5912

My email address has changed to dprunty@flatheadcounty.gov.

From: Melinda Marquis <melindamarquis@coloradobearcoalition.org>
Sent: Tuesday, July 8, 2025 1:32 PM
To: David Prunty <dprunty@flatheadcounty.gov>
Subject: Re: Electric fencing

Hi David,

Thank you! This is really helpful information. I have a few questions in red.

Is a "container site" the same as a "transfer station"? **yes, but we have multiple 4 cubic yard containers that citizens place there wastes in that are dumped by our front-loading refuse truck. A transfer station in my mind is a much larger facility with a tipping floor where the wastes are transferred to a long haul (usually 18 wheeled) truck/trailer. We don't have our container sites in a building, just on a gravel pad a couple acres in size exposed to the elements and surrounded by the fencing describe earlier.**

Do bears have access to and visit the landfill? You say you've never had an issue at the landfill that you're aware of. If so, do you know why bears don't go to the landfill? **Our landfill is in the middle of the Flathead Valley in between the cities of Kalispell and Whitefish on US Hwy 93. Not a real bear area until we have a dry poor bear food year where they do follow river corridors out of the mtns looking for food in the late summer into fall. That being said they can show up anywhere in our valley. FWP has trapped grizzlies in the valley floor on many occasions so it could easily happen. So far it hasn't, and we hope that continues. Black bears can be anywhere in our area, but they still don't come to the landfill that we know of. There are plenty of food sources (apples, cherries, curbside refuse containers etc.) that you do hear every now and again a bear shows up. Maybe we are just lucky so far.**

Under what conditions, if any, could I share your email with Colorado Parks and Wildlife and/or Pitkin County commissioners or staff? **It is a public record. You can share with anyone you like.**

Many thanks,
Melinda



Photo of electric fence at contain site (transfer station) in Flathead County, Montana. Courtesy of David Trunty, Public Works Director.