

# EXPANDING HUMAN-GRIZZLY BEAR CONFLICTS - THE **SITUATION,** **CHALLENGES,** AND **SOLUTIONS**



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MONTANA CONFLICT REDUCTION CONSORTIUM  
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## DEVELOPING A COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING

When landowners, livestock producers and other stakeholders convene to solve challenges on the landscape, be it weeds, water or wildlife conflicts, it is important to establish a collective understanding of not only the challenges and opportunities, but the social, ecological and economic conditions that created them. The situation, challenge, solution framework\* is an effective approach for concisely laying out the current situation or context relevant to a subject and offers an opportunity to integrate diverse values by collectively defining the problem and to provide solutions that appeal to multiple interests.

In the context of expanding grizzly bear populations, bear-human conflicts, and tensions over listing status in the Northern Rockies, there is not a shared holistic view of the problems among diverse stakeholders that can then inform durable solutions. Much of this tension comes from different visions of where grizzly bears should and should not be on the landscape. This lack of a shared understanding nurtures reactionary litigation and policy and continued frustration amongst the agricultural community and other parties including wildlife advocates. Conflict reduction work is mainly about people, and encouraging positive behaviors that can decrease the risks to people, livestock, and property. As with any conflict, finding solutions requires listening, deliberating, and trust building. Grounded in the experience of livestock producers living and working with grizzly bears, and honed by the membership of the Conflict Reduction Consortium (CRC), this document represents shared learning amongst diverse perspectives. As such, the goal of this document is to assist all stakeholders in coming to a collective understanding of the current situation and the challenges related to expanding human-bear conflict to inform a shared vision of success.

# THE SITUATION

Grizzly bears are expanding their ranges into historic habitats outside of recovery zones, and much of the expansion is happening on private working lands and the urban wildland interface. Grizzly bears in the lower 48 remain listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This designation provides essential tools for recovery efforts, but it also imposes limitations on management flexibility. Expansions in population are contributing to increased human-bear and bear-livestock conflicts within recovery areas, as well as a growing number of communities living and recreating at the expanding edges of their range. Many livestock producers both inside the recovery zones and out have made considerable efforts to adjust ranching practices to reduce conflict, and continue to do so at a considerable cost. Coordination amongst agencies, Tribes, non-profits, and place-based collaborative groups to deliver resources has played a crucial role in supporting communities dealing with grizzly bear conflicts.





## COLLECTIVE CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

The challenge lies in addressing **EXPANDING HUMAN-BEAR CONFLICTS**, which can disproportionately impact livestock producers and rural communities. Regardless of the **LISTING STATUS** of the species, conflicts will be present and resources and trust need to be in place to effectively manage those conflicts. There is a lack of **LONG-TERM CAPACITY** and **CONSISTENT, RELIABLE FUNDING** that meets the scale of the problem within rural and urban communities, which limits the ability to effectively reduce conflicts. A greater understanding of **BEAR POPULATION DENSITIES** at local scales outside of recovery areas will further support targeted response. Reducing conflicts will **PROTECT WORKING LANDS** and support **HEALTHY, CONNECTED, AND SUSTAINABLE** grizzly bear populations.

## THE CHALLENGES

**UNCERTAINTY IN BEAR POPULATION DENSITIES AT LOCAL SCALES** Livestock producers and bear managers need an understanding of current and accurate grizzly bear population density and movement studies at local scales to make effective management decisions outside of recovery areas. How and when this information is available to the public affects trust as there is an increasing need to understand bear populations and movement outside of recovery areas. Though, conveying the exact location of grizzly bears is challenging and may create liabilities.

**CONFIRMATION COMPENSATION CHALLENGES** Livestock depredation compensation programs require agency confirmation, which can be challenging in remote areas where carcasses are more difficult to locate or secure. In Montana, USDA Wildlife Services is the only agency that can officially confirm depredations. In other states, the responsibility may exist with other agencies, though capacity can often be limited.

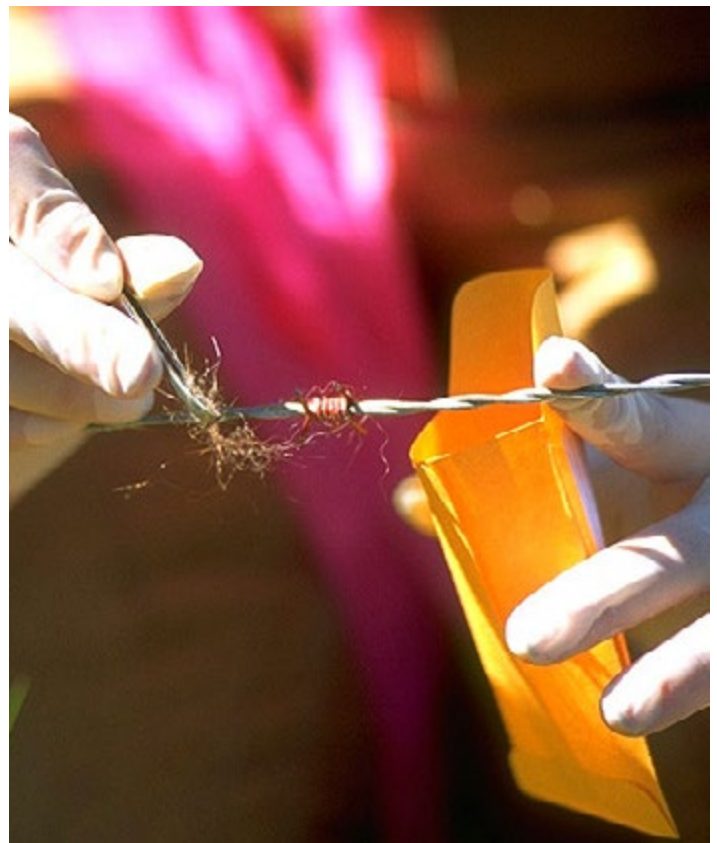
**PRODUCTION LOSSES FROM CONFLICT** High stress levels in cattle and sheep caused by the presence of grizzly bears can lead to reduced weight gain in calves and lambs, lower body condition scores in adult livestock, reduced conception rates, and higher abortion rates. Depredation events not only cost the ranchers money, but they also have the potential to remove desired genetic traits from the herd, which causes loss of efficiency and genetic continuity.

**CONFLICTS WITH RECREATIONISTS** Increasing recreational pressure and anthropogenic attractants including trash and unsecured food is creating additional potential for conflicts. As recreation continues to expand and be an economic driver for many parts of the West, there is an increasing likelihood of conflicts occurring between people and bears, whether it be directly out on the trails or as a result of improperly stored attractants.

**CLARITY OF CONFLICT RESPONSE PROTOCOL** An important component to trust between agencies and landowners is having a clear understanding of when and how relocation and lethal control will be implemented and consistency in application based on widely understood criteria. Timely responses to conflicts and appropriate management actions are needed to prevent and reduce future conflicts.

**DEVELOPMENT IMPACT** Increasingly, working lands that provide space for wildlife are being converted to subdivisions for development, encroaching upon bear habitat and leading to loss of habitat, habitat degradation and the increased potential for human-bear conflicts. Development also leads to an increase in attractants available to bears like garbage, domestic fruit, small livestock, livestock feed and bird feeders.

**FUNDING SHORTFALLS** Adequate funding is essential to provide landowners, communities, and practitioners access to conflict prevention tools and capacity at local levels. Additional funding is also needed to support place-based collaborative groups and conflict prevention, and effective grizzly bear management, monitoring, and conservation efforts.



# THE SOLUTIONS

Collectively, we see the following list of solutions (listed in no particular order) as offering potential for addressing identified challenges.



## COLLABORATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

Foster coordinated conflict reduction efforts involving livestock producers, government agencies and local governments. Information and education efforts should be supported that help create shared understanding of challenges and solutions between stakeholders.



## PLACE-BASED COLLABORATIVES

Strengthen and fund place-based collaboratives that facilitate on-the-ground conflict reduction, build trust, and inform sound policies. Community-led initiatives take time, energy, capacity and funding to succeed. These elements need to be sustainable, long-term and region-wide.



## HABITAT LEASING

Implement habitat leasing programs that create incentives for landowners to maintain suitable bear habitats, while addressing the economic burden of sharing space with this species.



## RESEARCH AND DENSITY STUDIES

Enhance research on bear population densities and dynamics both within and outside recovery areas using advanced tracking technologies. This comprehensive understanding will help livestock producers effectively prevent and reduce conflicts by linking local bear densities to potential conflict levels.



## COST SHARING FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION TOOLS

Support conflict prevention tools such as range riding, electric fencing, bear-resistant infrastructure, etc. through cost-sharing initiatives to reduce bear-livestock conflicts within affected communities.



## AWARENESS OF STEWARDSHIP BENEFITS

There is a need for public education campaigns increasing awareness of the ecosystem services maintained by working lands and the critical role ranches serve in maintaining wildlife habitat.



## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS THAT REDUCE CONFLICTS

Community-led strategies like sanitation regulations, securing local waste transfer sites, education and outreach campaigns and partnerships provide tools and resources to help prevent human-bear conflicts. This improves safety for both humans and bears in residential and more urban areas.



## RECREATION ACCESS MANAGEMENT AND TRAIL DESIGN

Many communities are directly adjacent to public lands. Public and private land managers should implement best practices to reduce conflicts between recreationists and bears including trail design, limiting access during dawn and dusk, setting and enforcing attractant / food storage, increased signage and education about bear safe behavior, and seasonal closures when needed.

## SUMMARY

Addressing grizzly bear expansion and management requires a multifaceted approach that balances ecological needs, community interests, and scientific research. By implementing these solutions, we can reduce conflicts and support the economic viability of working lands that provide important habitat within and between recovery areas for this species regardless of listing status.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

\*The situation, problem, solution framework was developed by Jared Talley, Assistant Professor in the Department of Environmental Studies at Boise State University.

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## **THE SITUATION, CHALLENGES, AND SOLUTIONS**

