

# THE BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF AND BEAR ACTIVITY REPORT SUMMER 2020

In coordination with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Region 2 (R2), the Blackfoot Challenge (BC) produces this wolf and bear activity report. These reports are compiled during our range rider season in the spring, summer and fall.

## **BACKGROUND & CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Bear management, preventative management and grizzly bear research trapping are handled by Eli Hampson (FWP) and Eric Graham (BC). Jamie Jonkel (FWP) assists as needed, handles calls from the public and provides logistical support. Rory Trimbo (FWP), who is a bear management technician stationed in the Deer Lodge Valley, assists in the Blackfoot as needed. At this time, we would also like to welcome and introduce Jake Barzen, the new Seeley Lake FWP Game Warden. Jake replaced Game Warden Bill Koppen, who retired last fall.

Wolf, lion and bear depredations or livestock loss reimbursement are handled by Wildlife Services (WS). See WS contact information below. Tyler Parks (FWP) handles all other wolf related management, wolf research trapping and reporting. Eli Hampson (FWP) handles mountain lion-related management. Scott Eggeman (FWP) is the point person for all issues pertaining to elk and deer and all aspects of wildlife in the Blackfoot watershed. And for any other wildlife-related matters and hunting issues needing the attention of a game warden contact Jake Barzen or Ezra Schwalm.

Thanks to the Blackfoot Challenge Range Riders – Sigrid Olson, Jordan Mannix and Vicki Pocha -- who assist with monitoring predator activity. To learn more about our team of range riders, [visit the Blackfoot Challenge's blog](#). We also thank Dan Masee and Barry Gordon who pick up most of the carcasses through the carcass pickup program. The Blackfoot Challenge Range Rider Program was established in 2008 and the Blackfoot Challenge Carcass Pickup Program has been ongoing since 2004.

Thanks again to the many Blackfoot residents that make these programs possible. We would also like to recognize all of the individuals, agencies and foundations that provide funding and technical assistance.

If you have any questions about the wildlife committee or this range rider program call the Blackfoot Challenge **Wildlife Committee Chair Randy Gazda (406) 880-4386**.

## **TO REPORT WOLF, BEAR AND LION ACTIVITY:**

**Eric Graham – Blackfoot Challenge Wildlife Coordinator (406) 240-3132**

**Jamie Jonkel – FWP Bear Management Specialist (406) 544-1447**

**Eli Hampson---FWP Bear/Lion Management Technician (406) 210-3213**

**Tyler Parks – FWP Wolf Management Specialist (406) 531-4454**  
**Rory Trimbo—FWP Deer Lodge Bear Management Technician (406) 465-9343**  
**Scott Eggeman – FWP Blackfoot Area Wildlife Biologist (406) 542-5542**

**TO REPORT A SUSPECTED LIVESTOCK DEPREDATION:**

Notify USDA Wildlife Services (WS) as soon as possible to determine the cause of death. Regarding reimbursement for losses through the Livestock Loss Board: If you suspect a livestock loss due to mountain lion/wolf/grizzly bear predation, you can request an investigation. The Livestock Loss Board can pay only for confirmed or probable losses as determined by WS.

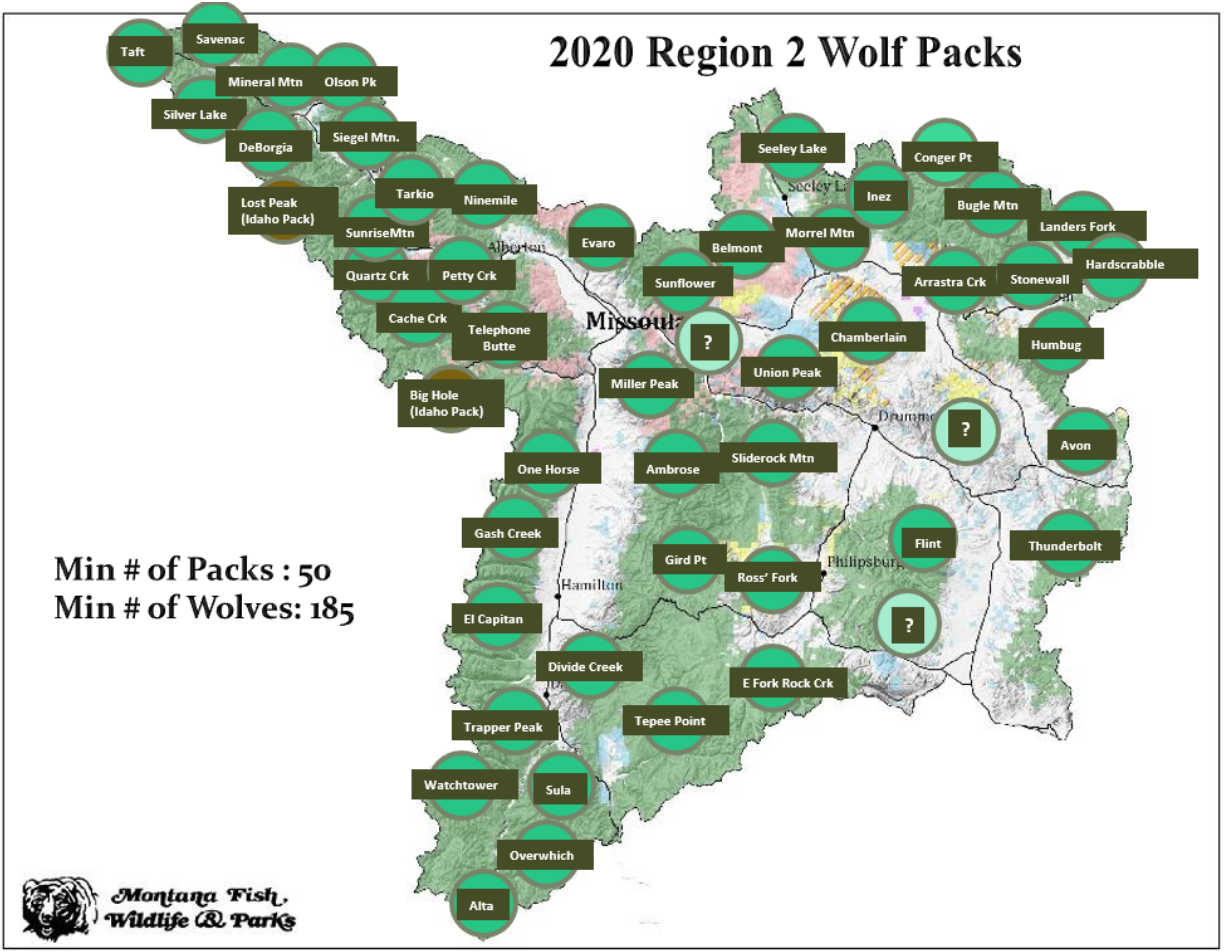
**WS Powell County - Bart Smith (406) 660-0368**  
**WS Missoula County - Ted North (406) 274-4856**  
**WS Lewis & Clark County - John Meidtke (406) 855-8429**  
**Western Montana District Supervisor- Kraig Glazier (406) 458-0106**  
**Department of Livestock - Livestock Loss Board (406) 444-5609**

For any other wildlife-related matters needing the attention of a **GAME WARDEN:**

**Ezra Schwalm—FWP Lincoln Game Warden (406) 438-3666**  
**Jake Barzen – FWP Seeley Lake Game Warden (406) 210-1299**

**BLACKFOOT WATERSHED WOLF PACKS:**

Montana FWP uses a Patch Occupancy Model (POM) to estimate Montana’s wolf population and track trends. Details on POM can be found in the Annual Wolf Report on the FWP website (<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/wolf/>). The transition to POM means that collecting minimum pack counts is no longer a high priority for monitoring wolf numbers. Therefore, the pack structure for most of the packs below is unknown. The rough numbers are based largely on public reports and summer trapping/scouting efforts.



ARRASTRA CREEK PACK

Pack Structure: 3 to 4 Adults, 3 Pups (one report of 7 pups was received, but only 3 pups have been documented using trail cameras)  
 Collared Wolf: No  
 Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

AVON PACK

Pack Structure: ~4  
 Collared Wolf: No  
 Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

BELMONT PACK

Pack Structure: ~4 Adults, Pups yes but number unknown  
 Collared Wolf: No  
 Pack Report: This pack is thought to spend time on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe reservation. Pup activity was found while scouting for radio collar trapping efforts. The total number of pups is unknown.

### BUGLE MOUNTAIN PACK

Backcountry

### CHAMBERLAIN PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Involved in multiple livestock depredations this summer.

### CONGER POINT PACK

Backcountry

### HARDSCRABBLE PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: 1 Possibly from Lander's Fork Pack

Pack Report: Possibly involved in three livestock depredation events this summer. The depredations occurred on the boundary of two packs, the Landers Fork pack may be responsible for the depredations. Wildlife Services collared one wolf and removed two wolves in response.

### HUMBUG PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: Yes (1) VHF collar missing (possibly dispersed)

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

### INEZ PACK

Pack Structure: 3 Adults, 3 Pups

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Two pups were collared by FWP this summer. One pup dropped the padded collar that was fitted for an adult and the other was hit and killed by vehicle on Highway 200.

### LANDERS FORK PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Possibly involved in three livestock depredation events this summer (see Hardscrabble Pack report).

### MORRELL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: ~3 Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

### SEELEY LAKE PACK

Pack Structure: ~4 or more Adults

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

### STONEWALL MOUNTAIN PACK

Pack Structure: Unknown

Collared Wolf: No

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

### SUNFLOWER PACK

Pack Structure: ~5 Adults, Pups unknown

Collared Wolf: Yes (2)

Pack Report: Nothing new to report.

### UNION PEAK PACK

Pack Structure: 3 or more Adults, 2 Pups

Collared Wolf: Yes (1)

Pack Report: Involved in two depredation events this summer. Wildlife Services collared one adult and removed 4 wolves in response.



Trail camera photo of three pups (foreground) and an adult in the Arrastra Creek Pack. Photo courtesy Tyler Parks.

## **2020 Wolf Depredations and Collar Update (April 26 – Sep 10):**

In the Blackfoot watershed, WS confirmed 10 calves and one ewe that were killed by wolves this summer (April 26 to September 10). The Chamberlain, Union Peak, Lander's Fork, Hardscrabble, and Thunderbolt wolf packs were all likely involved in the depredation events. WS radio-collared two wolves and lethally removed seven wolves in response to the confirmed wolf depredations. To assist with wolf monitoring around livestock, FWP collared 5 wolves in Region 2 in 2020, two of which were in the Blackfoot watershed.

## **2020 GRIZZLY BEAR ACTIVITY:**

### **SUMMARY:**

We have had an exceptional year of berry production. As a result, FWP R2 is fielding lots of reports of both black and grizzly bears feeding on chokecherry, serviceberry and hawthorn in the foothill regions, along stream bottoms and in the riparian zones along the rivers throughout the Blackfoot and Clearwater drainages. Huckleberry production in the higher elevations has been excellent. Residents as well as recreationists should use caution and carry bear spray when traveling through areas with abundant berries.

Throughout the spring and summer there have been abundant reports and observations of grizzlies feeding in crops and traveling through and feeding on natural foods. However, compared to past years there has been a reduction in the number of conflicts.

The first grizzly tracks reported this year were on 3/3/20 in the Arrastra Creek area and the first grizzly sighting was 3/18/20 east of Placid Lake. In April, more bears emerged from their dens and traveled to lower elevations. Most of the females with young were out of their dens by the first week of May. During the early spring we had good moisture and grizzlies were being observed throughout the Blackfoot drainage. In July and August, due to bountiful huckleberry, chokecherry and hawthorn berry production, sightings and conflicts remained low. Conflicts are expected to increase September through November -- historically the highest conflict period in the Blackfoot occurs in the fall.

### **LIVESTOCK DEPREDATIONS: One grizzly euthanized and two bears relocated**

Between March and the end of August, the WS and FWP R2 responded to six verified livestock depredation incidents and a handful of additional calls about livestock where cause of death or injury was either natural or not determined.

1. On 3/28/20 WS investigated wounds on a newborn calf at a ranch east of Ovando and determined that the injury was not grizzly-related.

2. From April 10 to 12, a lone grizzly killed and cached three calves, and may have killed a fourth calf, in a pasture bordering a riparian area on the same ranch mentioned above. Due to cold weather and snow it was not feasible to relocate the cow/calf herd. On April 13, WS captured a 452-pound adult male. After consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and in accordance with Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee guidelines, it was decided that because multiple calves had been killed by this individual bear, it would be euthanized. The hide and skull were salvaged for education purposes and the Blackfoot Challenge has begun working with the ranch on an electric fence project.
3. On 5/6/20, WS responded to a calf being killed near Helmville. Remote cameras on site indicated that multiple grizzlies and wolves were frequenting the area. WS, with the assistance of FWP, set two culvert traps and one snare. On 5/7/20 two grizzlies – a 680-pound adult male and a sub-adult male – were captured. A third grizzly bear, most likely another sub adult, was observed but not captured. Due to the number of bears at site and the inability to determine which of the three bears might have been involved, both bears were relocated. The large adult male, now known as “Wales,” was collared and relocated to the Whitefish Range west of Glacier National Park. The second grizzly, a research bear known as “Landers”, originally captured in 2019 during a research trapping effort northeast of Lincoln, was recollared and relocated to Glacier National Park.
4. On 5/11/20, WS set two culvert traps for a grizzly that killed a calf NW of Helmville. No bears were captured.
5. On 7/16/20, WS investigated a sheep depredation SW of Helmville. Due to lack of evidence the species of bear was not determined. Traps were set but no bears were captured.
6. On 8/9/20, WS set a snare for a grizzly involved in a calf depredation north of Drummond. Traps were set but no bears were captured.
7. WS investigated additional carcasses where it was determined the livestock had died of natural causes and were scavenged by grizzlies.
8. Note, one additional calf was killed on 5/16/20 in an incident that involved a grizzly bear mortality north of Lubrecht Experimental Forest. But this case is under investigation by the USFWS and cannot be discussed at this time.

#### **AGRICULTURAL AND RESIDENTIAL CONFLICTS:**

In mid-April there were several incidents of grizzlies in proximity to ranch compounds. Several of these incidents were associated with livestock carcasses and they were picked up as soon as the reports came in. FWP and the Blackfoot Challenge are recommending that after March all carcasses set aside for pickup be stored away from ranch premises if possible. Most of the residential related conflicts are associated with a grizzly bear accessing garbage in the Seeley Lake area, but there have been a handful of additional incidents:

1. During the month of May multiple grizzlies were observed around Helmville. Residents observed and photographed several lone grizzlies, several grizzly pairs and at least one family group. On 5/11/20 a trap was set for a large adult male grizzly that came into a

ranch compound to feed on a cow carcass. The carcass was removed immediately but the bear continued to be in the area and travel through the ranch compound during calving season. A temporary electric fence was erected around some attractants and no bears were captured.

2. On multiple occasions a lone grizzly and a female with yearlings accessed uncontained grain and pet food and damaged an ATV at a ranch north of Helmville. Traps were set on 7/15/20, but no bears were captured.
3. As mentioned above, most of this year's conflicts are associated with a grizzly hitting the Seeley Lake area. This bear may very well be the same bear that was seeking uncontained attractants in the Woodworth and Seeley Lake areas last year. This bear has obtained garbage from unsecured garbage cans, from improperly locked bear-resistant dumpsters and may have gotten into an outside freezer. The bear was first reported in early July and continues to access garbage at private resorts, rental cabins, businesses and various administrative sites and campgrounds. FWP is actively trapping for this grizzly.

### **GRIZZLY BEAR MORTALITIES:**

In 2020 there have been three confirmed grizzly bear mortalities:

1. The 452-pound adult male captured on 4/13/20 as mentioned above.
2. On 5/3/20, a sub adult male was killed west of Lincoln. This incident is under investigation and cannot be discussed at this time.
3. On 5/16/20, a 660-pound adult male was killed north of Lubrecht Experimental Forest. This incident is under investigation by the USFWS and cannot be discussed at this time.
4. On 7/10/20, FWP received multiple reports of a grizzly struck by a vehicle on Highway 200 near the North Fork of the Blackfoot River. FWP and the USFS responded but no carcass was located. Note, it is legal to retrieve road-killed deer, elk and moose in the state of Montana, but not black bears or grizzlies. For more information on the laws pertaining to salvaging road-kill check out this FWP news release: <https://bit.ly/3k9tkBz>

### **COLLARED GRIZZLY BEARS:**

1. On April 10 during the spring radio-tracking flight it was discovered that the research female grizzly bear "Silver Queen" had dropped her collar northwest of Silver King Mountain. She had been collared since July 2018. She was originally captured northeast of Lincoln and was observed last fall with her yearling in the headwaters of the Landers Fork of the Blackfoot. This bear spent most of her time ranging the south end of the Scapegoat Wilderness between the Landers Fork and McDonald Pass. "Silver Queen" is an older 245-pound adult female.
2. "Walking Bear", a 535-pound adult male, recaptured last July 2018, was observed from the air on April 10 but he has not been located on subsequent flights. His den site was not determined this spring, but in 2018 and 2019 he denned in Arrastra Creek. He continues to wear his malfunctioning radio collar and spends most of his time ranging



the river bottoms around the Aunt Molly Wildlife Management Area, the Blackfoot Canyon and the mountains north and south of Lincoln, MT. In year's past "Walking Bear" has made two tremendous fast paced trips from the Blackfoot Valley over the top of the Mission Mountains to visit the corn fields around Ronan, MT.

3. On 5/6/20, WS and FWP set several traps at a calf depredation near Helmville and recaptured the research grizzly known as "Landers". Landers was originally captured in 2019 in the headwaters of the Landers Fork. It was difficult to determine if "Landers" was involved in the calf depredation, so he was recollared and relocated on 5/8/20 to Glacier National Park. He spent the summer in Glacier National Park and dropped his collar near the end of July five miles east of Duck Lake on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation, Squaw Flat along the north fork of the Milk River not far from the Canadian Border.
4. On 5/6/20, WS and FWP set several traps at a calf depredation near Helmville and captured a 680-pound adult male grizzly. It was difficult to determine if this new bear, now known as "Wales," was involved in the calf depredation so he was collared and relocated on 5/8/20 to the Whitefish Range West of Glacier National Park. "Wales" dropped his collar in late June north of the Canadian Border and east of Waterton Park along the Belly River.



The 680 pound male grizzly bear named "Wales" in a culvert trap. Photo by Lennie Phillips.

5. On 6/7/20, the Flathead Indian Reservation agreed to have a Blackfoot Reservation grizzly relocated to the Upper Jocko Valley. The collared female grizzly known as "Sue" spent a little bit of time in and around the Swan-Clearwater Divide and was most recently located in the Bob Marshal Wilderness in the central portions of the South Fork

of the Flathead Basin. “Sue” has no management history and was captured and relocated to get her away from some home sites near East Glacier where her chances of survival were limited.

6. On 6/10/20, the female grizzly bear “Ursa” and her two yearlings were in Alice Creek in the headwaters of the Blackfoot River near the Continental Divide. “Ursa” was captured last year on August 26 up the Landers Fork northeast of Lincoln. She spends most of her time ranging the south end of the Scapegoat Wilderness between the Landers Fork and McDonald Pass. “Ursa” is an older 250-pound adult female.
7. On 8/5/20, a sub adult grizzly known as “Trapper” was re-captured for research purposes in the headwaters of Boles Creek west of Placid Lake. The young bear was not collared and was released at site. “Trapper” was originally handled in the late fall of 2018 where he was captured in a leghold trap set for coyotes. To free the cub a helicopter was used to haze the cub’s mother and siblings. The cub was then darted and the trap was removed to allow him to rejoin his mother and siblings.

### **2020 BLACK BEAR AND MOUNTAIN LION ACTIVITY:**

Black bear conflicts in the Seeley Lake have been constant this year. So far three black bears have been captured and euthanized. All three bears were exhibiting extreme food-conditioned behavior and had been observed accessing uncontained attractants at multiple businesses and homesites. At the time of capture the bears were approaching occupied camps and eating food from coolers and BBQ cookouts. Multiple other black bears have been reported accessing uncontained garbage, bird seed and other attractants in and around Seeley Lake. Black bears in the community of Seeley Lake have been regularly observed accessing garbage and other uncontained attractants throughout the bear season. The Potomac Valley and Lincoln area have had very few black bear issues so far this season.

This summer FWP fielded multiple reports of lions throughout the Blackfoot and Clearwater Valleys. Similar to year’s past, most of the reports were from the communities of Potomac, Seeley Lake and Lincoln. These three communities are known for lion activity due to prime habitat and abundant deer. In Seeley Lake, FWP responded to several reports of mountain lions involving attacks on dogs, cats or in proximity to people. Four sub adult mountain lions have been removed this summer from Seeley Lake. There were several reports of lions frequenting homesites in the Potomac area and WS removed one lion that killed a goat.

Please report black bear and mountain lion activity and incidents as quickly as possible to FWP.

For detailed information on black bear and lion activity in and around FWP Region 2, visit:

<http://missoulabears.org/> and <https://www.facebook.com/missoulabears/>

## **GRIZZLY BEAR RESEARCH TRAPPING**

Research trapping for a female grizzly has been ongoing for most of the summer. No new female grizzlies have been captured. “Trapper,” a non-target male grizzly, was captured and released. Trapping efforts were focused near the Rattlesnake Wilderness Area and will continue next season. For more information related to the grizzly bear population monitoring, go to:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/grizzlyBear/monitoring.html>



Eli Hampson, FWP, with “Trapper”.  
Photo by Eric Graham.

## **GRIZZLY BEAR ADVISORY COUNCIL UPDATE:**

Grizzly bear management in Montana is complex. While grizzly bears are at recovery levels in the Greater Yellowstone (GYE) and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystems (NCDE), they have yet to reach recovery goals in the Bitterroot and Cabinet-Yaak Recovery Zones. In places where bear numbers are on the rise, they are dispersing into places they haven’t been for decades, sometimes causing conflicts with people and communities. Last year the Governor of Montana appointed members to the Grizzly Bear Advisory Council. The council has been working diligently and will eventually have recommendations for grizzly bear management and conservation in Montana.

The Grizzly Bear Advisory Council is comprised of a broad cross section of Montanans with a diversity of views on grizzly bear management, conservation, and recovery. The Council has been tasked with considering broad strategic objectives, such as:

1. Maintaining and enhancing human safety
2. Ensuring a healthy and sustainable grizzly bear population
3. Improving timely and effective response to conflicts involving grizzly bears
4. Engaging all partners in grizzly-related outreach and conflict prevention
5. Improving intergovernmental, interagency, and tribal coordination

For more information about the Grizzly Bear Advisory Council:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/grizzlyBear/gbac.html>

## **LIVESTOCK CARCASS PICKUP PROGRAM:**

The Blackfoot Challenge's Livestock Carcass Pick Up and Removal Program runs during calving season from mid-February through mid-May. Thereafter, carcasses in the Blackfoot watershed are picked up by FWP or BC employees. The carcass will be taken to the compost site near Clearwater Junction to help prevent conflicts with bears and wolves.

To arrange for carcass pickup during calving season call Dan Masee 793-5639 and for carcass pickup outside of calving season call Jamie Jonkel 544-1447 or Barry Gordon 241-1078.

Due to issues with grizzlies being lured into several ranch compounds for livestock carcasses in past years, it is recommended that after April 1st carcasses be stored at a minimum of 400 yards from human and livestock activity at an accessible site with good visibility. Make sure the carcasses are still convenient for carcass pickup. If possible, place carcass on top of an old hay bale. If there is concern that a carcass will lure in bears before pick up, there is always the option of personally hauling the carcass to the Clearwater Compost site.

To learn more about this program, watch "Living with Carnivores: Boneyards, Bear & Wolves" -- <https://vimeo.com/131528982>.

Note: Prior to having a horse or livestock animal put down, please consult with your veterinarian about not using pentobarbital based euthanasia drugs if the carcass is being taken to the compost site. Horses, cattle or other livestock put down with barbiturates cannot be taken to the livestock composting site. Instead they must be hauled to the Missoula or Deer Lodge landfill and be buried. Advanced notice is necessary to arrange for an animal to be buried at the Missoula landfill.

Prior to butchering cattle or other livestock be sure to have a tub or bucket available for the guts and be prepared to assist the driver with loading. In some cases the Blackfoot Challenge may be able to provide a container.

## **SECURING RESIDENTIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ATTRACTANTS:**

As detailed above, there are a few grizzlies in the Blackfoot watershed that have developed bad habits in past years. In 2018, for example, a handful of bears learned that homesites and ranches are good places to find unsecured food. Several of these grizzlies were removed in 2019, but any uncontained attractants can train up new bears. Therefore, it is always best to lock up all sheds and barns where garbage, grain and other attractants are stored. If you need additional alarm devices, bear spray, electric fence materials or energizers for containing carcasses or other bear attractants (grain, sweet licks, garbage, etc.) call Eric Graham or James Jonkel.

And for information on how to avoid either directly or indirectly feeding wildlife in Montana, visit: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/livingWithWildlife/feeding/default.html>

## **ELECTRIC FENCE COST SHARE:**

Multiple fencing projects have occurred at various ranches and residential sites across the watershed. Over the last three summers, the Blackfoot Challenge has assisted multiple families with electrified residential containment fences. In years past the Blackfoot Challenge secured funds to electrify the Helmville Dump, the Ovando Dump, the Seeley Lake Dump and the Clearwater Junction Compost Site. These electric fences have proven effective at deterring bears.

Electric fencing is an excellent way to protect livestock, fowl and contain residential attractants. Electric fence is a method of ensuring that bears or other predators that check out yard areas will not come back again. A good shock is the best way to teach bears to keep away. Contact Jamie Jonkel or Eric Graham if you would like to talk about cost share programs to install electric fence around home sites, livestock holding pens, chickens, cattle, pigs, goats, sheep, bee yards, fruit orchards, gardens and other sites that might attract bears or other wildlife. For information on electric fence and another option for cost sharing on electric fence check out this website: <https://defenders.org/got-grizzlies>



The new electric fence at the compost site near Clearwater Junction. Photo by Eric Graham.