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Bear bins working along Rocky Mountain Front, officials say

Associated Press

DUPUYER, Mont. - A three-pronged effort to lessen problems from an influx of grizzly bears along the Rocky Mountain Front apparently is working, officials say.

The Defenders of Wildlife, Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and Pondera County combined to buy and place 26 UnBearAble Bins in and around this community, and bear problems took a dive.

"We haven't had any reports of garbage problems since they've been put out," said Pondera County Commissioner Joe Christiaens.

A late spring freeze wiped out the wild berry crop, prompting far more bear forays to the plains from the nearby mountains than normal, particularly along Dupuyer Creek.

"We had 'em in town, around the school, the businesses, in the park, everywhere," said Christiaens.

As problems began mounting in July, Defenders of Wildlife bought six of the bear-proof bins from a company in Alberta, Canada, to replace trash barrels. The state agency and county then helped buy 20 more to place at private houses in the area, said FWP bear biologist Mike Madel of Choteau.

"They have been very effective," Madel said.

He said the number of conflicts reported between grizzlies and people may be the most on record in this region. "This certainly stands out in my 20 years," Madel said.

"I have never had a year like this where grizzly bears are breaking into sheds or just walking into sheds for livestock feed and grain."

Minette Johnson, Northern Rockies regional representative for Defenders of Wildlife, said this has been a very bad year for bears.

"There is such a lack of natural foods," she said. "They are hitting the garbage like never before."

to make sure food is not left out in the open and livestock feed is in a secure location, he said.

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