

IGBC Bitterroot Ecosystem Subcommittee

Food Storage Working Group

Recommended Attractant Storage Implementation Framework

05/29/2025

Background

There is a clear link between human-bear conflicts and access by bears to human-provided attractants. Available attractants can draw bears to human use areas, which increases the risk of conflicts. Moreover, associating people with food becomes a learned behavior for bears. Consequently, it is critical to keep food rewards unavailable to bears.

The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee's (IGBC) Bitterroot Ecosystem Subcommittee (Subcommittee) recognizes that proper sanitation and food storage are important for both human safety and bear conservation. Black bears occur across the Bitterroot Ecosystem, grizzly bear sightings have begun to occur more frequently near the periphery and within this ecosystem, and grizzly bear recovery planning has been renewed in this ecosystem. For these reasons, the Subcommittee believes there is a need to develop a framework for implementing a cooperative and proactive approach for attractant storage that makes sense for this landscape. Toward that end, the Subcommittee established an interagency Food Storage Working Group (Working Group) in 2021 with instructions to examine this topic and provide recommendations for how to proceed.

The Working Group provided several presentations to the Subcommittee during recent years, updating members and asking for input to inform the Working Group's iterative and deliberative progress. Most recently, during the Fall 2024 Subcommittee meeting, this Framework was presented to the Subcommittee, and members were asked for feedback. No comments were received, and this Framework represents the Working Group's recommendations for implementation of an attractant storage program in the Bitterroot Ecosystem.

Summary

This Implementation Framework uses an approach agreed upon within the Subcommittee where the status of grizzly bears in an area would trigger recommended management actions in that area. Relevant categories pertain to areas where grizzly bears may be present but are outside occupied range ("May Be Present") and areas within occupied grizzly bear range ("Occupied Range"). Both of these bear status categories are determined and mapped by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The “May Be Present” category encompasses the potential movement of transitory bears through an area outside of the current distribution of grizzly bears based on verified sightings and the inclusion of associated watersheds. “Occupied Range” encompasses areas in which grizzly bears have established home ranges and continuously reside. Recommended management actions that correspond with those status categories are presented for different land management jurisdictions across the Bitterroot Ecosystem (Federal, State, Tribal, Private) and are grouped by actions that pertain to recommendations for Education, Sanitation and Regulation. Key components of this Framework include: 1) communicating with the public through bear awareness information/education/outreach; 2) assessing the need for and providing bear-resistant infrastructure (e.g., food storage lockers, garbage containers, etc.) at public land administrative and developed recreation sites; and 3) development and implementation of suitable food storage regulations, when and where appropriate. These recommended actions can be implemented incrementally or in phases, and at scales that are deemed appropriate by local managers. The success of this attractant storage program will be enhanced by effective outreach, multi-jurisdictional coordination, and consistent enforcement.

In addition to areas that overlap with grizzly bear “May Be Present” or “Occupied Range” designations, it is also recommended that these actions be considered for implementation at sites where incidents of black bears successfully accessing human food/garbage are already known to occur.

Recommendations for areas where grizzly bears “May Be Present” ([USFWS Map](#))

For areas of the Bitterroot Ecosystem that overlap with areas where grizzly bears “[May Be Present](#),” it is recommended that the following actions be implemented. In general, this stage of the Implementation Framework is where managers make plans for their jurisdiction and prepare for a time when grizzly bears occur in their respective areas (although it may make sense to implement some actions at this stage). The scale of development and implementation of these plans, preparations, or actions would be determined by jurisdiction (e.g., for land managers, the applied scale could be as fine as a single developed recreation site, or as broad as a national forest). Within “May Be Present” areas, Federal managers should consider whether there may be Endangered Species Act (ESA) S.7 consultation requirements (e.g., there may be potential advantages from a 7a1 and 7a2 standpoint to implementation prior to occupancy).

- **Federal Actions**

- Education

- Provide bear awareness signage at developed recreation sites
 - Educate field employees on proper food/garbage storage
 - Plan and manage training, certification, and use/storage of bear spray by employees

- Sanitation

- At developed recreation sites, identify and reduce garbage containers that are not bear-resistant
 - Ensure that garbage at administrative sites is secured from bears
 - Begin training field crews to follow proper food storage when on duty
 - Train recreation and river technicians to provide education on proper attractant storage
 - Assess recreation sites where proper food storage options are limiting – make plans for addressing limitations, such as:
 - Determine options for how food could be stored at that site (people’s vehicles, storage boxes, food poles, etc.)
 - Decide to remove garbage facilities or upgrade them to bear-resistant
 - Determine infrastructure needs (install food poles, bear-resistant food storage lockers/dumpsters) and apply for funding
 - Permits – Develop food storage language that can be used in outfitter, recreation, grazing, mineral, and other permits
 - Contracts – Develop contract language for proper food storage where appropriate

- Recreation residences – Develop language for modifications to recreational residence permits, if needed
- Regulation
 - Federal managers consider what food storage regulations might look like for their area of jurisdiction
 - Assess food storage regulations in adjacent areas for pertinent examples
 - Federal land managers consider the scale at which regulations should apply when implemented (e.g., recreation site, US Forest Service (USFS) District or Forest, etc.)
 - Federal land managers consider a plan for when regulations might be implemented; for instance, consider how much of their unit would need to overlap a “May Be Present” area before regulations are implemented.
- **State Actions**
 - Create or identify signage related to proper food storage for developed recreation sites on State lands
 - Develop language in State contracts and permits about proper food storage, where appropriate
- **Tribal Actions**
 - Create or identify signage related to proper food storage for developed recreation sites on Tribal lands
 - Develop language in Tribal contracts and permits about proper food storage, where appropriate
- **Private Actions**
 - *Local Governments*
 - Learn about pertinent issues related to human/bear conflicts and options for resolution
 - Consider drafting language related to attractant storage that could be included in local ordinances for future implementation, if desired
 - Learn about issues related to garbage management and waste hauling contractors in relation to bear-resistant garbage containers
 - Begin securing garbage at county and town offices, garbage transfer sites, etc.
 - *Private Landowners*
 - Seek information on living in bear country
 - Begin to implement solutions if problems noted
 - *Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Supporting Grizzly Bears*
 - Working relationships in the communities should be well established to develop support for mission of reducing conflict between people and bears
 - Identify key areas of concern on private lands

- Beginning the planning process with landowners and communities to take on conflict reduction actions

Recommendations for areas within “Occupied Range” of grizzly bears ([USFWS Map](#))

Where “Occupied Range” of grizzly bears (as mapped by the USFWS) overlaps with areas of the Bitterroot Ecosystem, it is recommended that the following actions be implemented. This stage of the Implementation Framework is when it is recommended that plans from the earlier stage would be put into action. The scale of implementation of these plans and actions would be determined by jurisdiction (e.g., for land managers, the applied scale could be as fine as a single developed recreation site, or as broad as a national forest). Within “Occupied Range” areas, Federal managers should consider whether there may be ESA S.7 consultation requirements.

- **Federal Actions**

- Education

- Signage at all developed recreation sites is in place
 - All field personnel consistently educated on proper food storage
 - Training, certification, and use/storage for bear spray by employees is standard operating procedure
 - Bear spray is available to field going crews or employees

- Sanitation

- Finalize the elimination of non-bear-resistant garbage containers at developed recreation sites
 - Ensure all administrative site attractants are secured from bears
 - Training of all crews to follow proper food storage when on duty is standard operating procedure
 - Recreation and river technicians actively providing education on proper attractant storage
 - Managers are implementing the plan for food storage at all recreation sites
 - Unsecured garbage facilities are removed or upgraded using bear-resistant infrastructure
 - Planned bear-resistant infrastructure is mostly in place and operational
 - Permits – Proper food storage language is included in all outfitter, recreation, grazing, mineral, and other permits
 - Contracts – Contract language for proper food storage included in all contracts
 - Recreational residence permits amended to include food storage requirements.

- Regulation

- Food storage regulations finalized and implemented by Federal land managers at the scale decided upon (e.g., USFS District or Forest) when “Occupied Range” overlaps that jurisdiction.
- When “Occupied Range” overlaps an area, food storage regulations should be implemented in that area, with the scale of implementation to be determined by local managers.

- **State Actions**

- Signage related to proper food storage posted at all developed recreation sites on State lands
- Include language in applicable State contracts and permits about proper food storage

- **Tribal Actions**

- Signage related to proper food storage posted at all developed recreation sites on Tribal lands
- Include language in applicable Tribal contracts and permits about proper food storage

- **Private Actions**

- *Local Governments*
 - Clear rationale for the absence or presence of local food storage ordinances is documented
 - If desired, plans with garbage management contractors are underway or finalized
 - County and town garbage transfer sites and dumpsters at county/town offices etc. are secured from bears
- *Private Landowners*
 - Informed about living in bear country
 - Actions and continuing efforts taken to mitigate issues at conflict sites
- *NGOs Supporting Grizzly Bears*
 - Working toward goals and actions set with the community
 - Key areas of concern on private lands mostly mitigated