

Frequently Asked Questions about BearWise Funding

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What is BearWise?

The [Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies](#) has initiated BearWise as a regional effort to prevent human-bear conflicts and protect people and bears across its 15 member states. The goal of Florida's BearWise program is to reduce conflicts and promote coexistence between people and bears through community-wide efforts to identify and secure all potential human provided food sources and require those sources be kept secure, educate community members about appropriate responses to bear interactions, and know when and how to report bear activity.

How much BearWise funding has the FWC provided?

Between 2007 and 2019, the FWC has provided almost \$2.1 million to cost-share the purchase of bear-resistant trashcans and other equipment to keep garbage secure and reduce human-bear conflicts.

What are BearWise funds used for?

BearWise funds were used to share the cost of bear-resistant equipment, the labor required to modify containers to make them bear-resistant, and/or the labor required to build containers to secure attractants.

What areas received BearWise funding?

The FWC prioritized BearWise funding to go to the counties with the highest level of human-bear conflicts in the State: Bay, Collier, Franklin, Gulf, Highlands, Lake, Leon, Marion, Okaloosa, Orange, Putnam, Santa Rosa, Seminole, Volusia, Wakulla, and Walton counties.

Will there be BearWise funding available during Fiscal Year 2019-2020?

No funding is available for BearWise cost-share grants in Fiscal Year 2019-2020.

Why didn't the FWC receive BearWise funding in Fiscal Year 2019-2020?

The FWC receives the BearWise monies through funding provided either through the Legislature or as grants from the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida, funded by proceeds from sales of the Conserve Wildlife specialty license plate. Funding from both sources varies depending on funds available and priorities of other funding requests.

What can communities do to get bear-resistant equipment without BearWise funding?

Previous BearWise funding has helped communities lay the foundation so that bear-resistant equipment is much more widely available in Florida. If individual residents are interested in getting bear-resistant equipment, they can get a reduced rate if they have their homeowner's association, city, or county combine multiple requests together to place a bulk order. Homeowner's associations, cities, or counties can also require waste service companies they have contracts with to provide bear-resistant trashcans at reasonable (or no) cost to their residents living in areas with human-bear conflicts.

Will the FWC provide BearWise funding in the future?

If funding is available in the future, we will provide BearWise grants because securing trash has been successful in reducing human-bear conflicts.

Did the previous BearWise monies reduce human-bear conflicts?

The FWC has published research in a scientific peer-reviewed journal [article](#) that showed securing trash reduced conflicts at the community-wide scale by 55% to 95%. The FWC is currently conducting additional research on a larger scale related to the recent BearWise

funding. The FWC is collecting information from residents before and after they have the bear-resistant equipment. The survey will focus on residents that have the equipment as well as those who do not, but who live in the same general area. The FWC will be able to complete this work sometime in 2020.

Can ordinances that require people to keep their trash secure help reduce human-bear conflicts?

Some conflicts can be resolved by individual citizens taking personal responsibility and securing their attractants; however, relying solely on voluntary actions has not been sufficient to significantly reduce human-bear conflicts in Florida or elsewhere. If enough homes in a community do not secure their food, the entire neighborhood will still have bears frequenting the area to access that food source. Recent studies show that at least 60% of a community must secure their trash to succeed in preventing bears from lingering in neighborhoods. When local governments approve ordinances requiring trash be kept secure from bears, most, if not all members of a community will [comply](#), and for those who do not, education coupled with enforcement can be used to achieve the highest compliance levels.

Would an ordinance require residents and businesses to purchase bear-resistant equipment?

No. An ordinance does not need to require anyone to purchase additional equipment. Effective ordinances ask people to keep their trash secure until the morning of garbage pick-up or until they bring their garbage to a drop off site. In most cases, people can keep their trash secure from bears by storing it in a garage or sturdy shed.

Can the FWC assist local governments with the creation of an ordinance?

Yes. The FWC is available to assist local governments with ordinances, and has examples of [ordinances](#) online.

Can an ordinance only apply to new developments?

Ideally, an ordinance would require all people in areas with high levels of human-bear conflicts to keep their trash secure in order to have a community-wide reduction in human-bear conflicts. However, if there are concerns about requiring current residents to comply with a trash ordinance, the local government could adopt a trash ordinance that would only apply to future development. In this situation, bear-resistant equipment could be required as part of the cost of development, or the ordinance could simply require trash be kept secure for all new residents.

What are some examples of BearWise projects that received funding?

A [summary](#) of BearWise funding awards in previous years is available. Many BearWise funding recipients increased the availability of bear-resistant trashcans for their residents by offering the cans for sale at a reduced rate. The FWC, local government, and residents each paid a portion of the purchase price for bear-resistant trashcans, and the resident payments were used to buy more bear-resistant trashcans in the future. Other projects paid to modify existing dumpsters with reinforced lids and locking bars to make them bear-resistant, or purchased hardware that can be added to regular, sturdy trashcans to make them bear-resistant.