

Gallagher gets Grizzly



Got a problem keeping a few cows fenced in? How about keeping a few hundred grizzlies fenced out? Or making sure a few dozen black bears aren't getting after your goats?

Bears of all kinds are a sometime dangerous nuisance around Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and the national forests of northwestern Wyoming. It's a wilderness area bordered by Montana and Idaho that's perfect habitat for a large and growing population of bears.

Bears are born scavengers that can get aggressive when they're hungry. Easily accessible campsites, apiaries and dumpsters are nothing more than convenient dining spots for these creatures. When they decide to munch on whatever's handy, they can do serious economic damage and threaten people as well as livestock.

Mark Bruscano is a bear specialist with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Bears are his constant problem. "They're smart animals," he said, "they'll find a way to get around most preventative measures. They can knock down barriers and tunnel under most fences."

"We have to keep them out of grain sheds, small garbage dumps and dumpsters. Most of the things we tried in the early 1990's didn't work," he said.

In 1993 Morgan Renner, a field specialist with Gallagher, helped design an electric fence to solve the problem. "I'm sold on it," said Bruscano as he talked about the fence. "It's top notch stuff."

The fence is "100% effective" when it's maintained properly, according to Bruscano.

The Game and Fish Department uses permanent and temporary Gallagher fences now. The permanent fences are where bears are a constant problem – around camp grounds, for instance. Temporary fences can be quickly erected around sites like grain bins until the bear can be captured and transported to a remote location.

“We use a five wire fence with high tensile strength wire. Because it can be very dry, we use alternating hot and ground wires to make sure we’ve got full conductivity,” said Bruscano as he described the permanent set up. Wooden corner posts anchor the fence and he uses fiberglass posts to support the wire. The lower three wires are spaced six inches apart and the top two wires have 10 inches between them, making for a bear proof barrier.

Bruscano estimates bears have tested the fence hundreds of times without successfully breaking through. “Usually, they just spin around and take off,” he said. “I saw evidence that a bear swatted at the wire once but all it did was stretch it out a bit.”

To prevent “tunneling” bears from going underground, Bruscano uses a woven wire ground in some place. Stretching about three feet out from the fence line, it’s additional discouragement to marauding beasts.

Bee keepers in the region sleep better at night and goat herds graze unmolested. More importantly, campers can sleep safely at night, too, with nothing between them and the night air but a few square yards of canvas.

According to Erwin Quinn, president of Gallagher, “An electric fence is a psychological barrier that keeps farm animals and wild animals where they should be with safety and security. Because the fence is a psychological barrier, it doesn’t require great strength to be effective. However, it must be well designed in accordance with the species to be controlled, and constructed to withstand the harsh weather conditions that hit the Rockies in the dead of winter.”

The company, based in North Kansas City, Missouri, is one of the world’s largest manufacturers of electric fences designed to contain cattle, horses and other farm animals as well as prevent wild animals and predators from gaining access to areas where they can do economic damage.