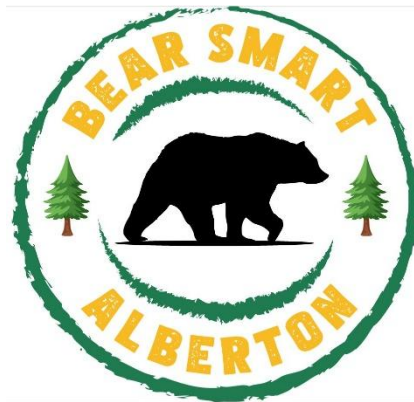


Bear Smart Alberton

2025 Accomplishment Report



Prepared by the Bear Smart Alberton Working Group

January 2026

bearsmartalberton@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/bearsmartalberton/ | www.instagram.com/bearsmartalberton/

Bear Smart Alberton 2025 Accomplishment Report

The managing body of Bear Smart Alberton is the Bear Smart Alberton Working Group, established in March 2023. Our mission is to be a facilitator for reducing human-bear conflicts in Alberton, Montana and nearby areas and to help guide Alberton on a path towards becoming a Bear Smart Community. This report identifies our accomplishments during the 2025 calendar year.

The Bear Smart Communities Program

The Bear Smart Communities program is an effort that originated in British Columbia, Canada to systematically reduce conflicts between people and bears by following well-defined steps and practices. In 2022, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee adopted a similar framework for areas within Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming. The Bear Smart Communities program has been implemented in numerous locations across Canada and the United States, including several communities in Montana. It has been successful in enhancing the safety of both bears and people by reducing the number and level of human-bear conflicts.

Bear Smart Alberton Working Group

The Bear Smart Alberton Working Group (BSAWG) is an organization of individuals with a keen interest in helping people and bears live safely in and near our community. Until recently, the group had been a fluid assortment of individuals who attended our monthly meetings. Having received significant grant funding in 2025, we felt a need to organize more formally in order to responsibly perform planning and decision-making activities. We formed a Board of Directors in September 2025. Current Board members are as follows:

Name	Office	Affiliation
Bob Summerfield	president	Brovold Community Orchard
Connie Hart	secretary	Frenchtown Middle School
Jennifer Fortin-Noreus	treasurer	Wild Solutions Consulting LLC
James Jonkel	technical advisor	Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Sharon Briggs	director	Alberton Town Council
Loreen M. Felstet	director	Alberton Mayor
Averie Jones	director	Citizen Volunteer

BSAWG currently employs one part-time contract employee, Dr. Jennifer Fortin-Noreus of Wild Solutions Consulting LLC. Jennifer's title is Community Coordinator, and her work portfolio includes coordination with our many collaborators, public information and education outreach, and assisting the working group with planning and administrative tasks. Jennifer also serves as treasurer on our Board of Directors. This is a temporary position that is set to expire in July 2027 when the position's grant funding runs out.

BSAWG meets monthly on the last Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. in the Alberton Community Center. An online video meeting option is available for those who cannot attend in person. Meetings are open to the public and everyone is encouraged to attend. We are very much interested in increasing local participation in making Alberton a Bear Smart Community, and we want you to know you are welcome to attend our meetings and share your views.

If you would like to be on our email list to receive meeting announcements, periodic updates, or other important information about Bear Smart Alberton, please let us know at bearsmartalberton@gmail.com.

Collaborators

Making Alberton a Bear Smart Community is a job much bigger than BSAWG could handle alone. It takes many players to field a team capable of planning, funding, coordinating, implementing, monitoring, and reporting on the diverse and complex tasks necessary to become a Bear Smart Community. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by our collaborators. Without you, our work would be impossible.

Our 2025 collaborators included:

- Local Government – Alberton Mayor and Town Council, Mineral County Conservation District
- State Government – Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- Federal Government – US Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Wildlife Services
- Multi-agency - Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC)
- Businesses – Republic Services, Toter LLC
- Schools – Alberton School District
- Nonprofits – Brovold Community Orchard, Defenders of Wildlife, Heart of the Rockies Initiative, Missoula Bears, Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, People and Carnivores, Wildlife Management Institute, Working Dogs for Conservation, Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative

If you represent a business, organization, or government entity that would like to collaborate with us on making Alberton a Bear Smart Community, please let us know. We would welcome your partnership.

Community Planning and Local Government

Before any community can become a Bear Smart Community, the support of local government is essential. Local government leaders are elected to represent the will of the people. Without the support of the people, any program is likely to be unsuccessful. BSAWG conducted a community survey in 2024. The survey demonstrated that the people of Alberton are well aware of the historical and current level of human-bear conflicts in the community and strongly support taking steps to reduce these conflicts. We are pleased that the Alberton Mayor and Town Council have stepped forward to address this need. In November 2024, they approved a resolution expressing their support for and intention to make Alberton a Bear Smart Community. BSAWG subsequently drafted a Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan detailing the actions needed to reduce human-bear conflicts in our community. The Alberton Town Council passed a resolution in September 2025 adopting the Plan as the official [Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan for Alberton](#).

The resolution commits the Town to not just supporting Alberton as a Bear Smart Community, but to actively participating in implementing the steps needed to do so. We congratulate the Town on taking

this bold and important step to make Alberton and the surrounding area a place where bears and people can both live safely.

Garbage is currently the most significant bear attractant in Alberton. Alberton's current garbage ordinance is confusing and likely unenforceable. The Alberton Town Council has requested BSAWG's assistance in drafting a new garbage ordinance for the Town. This will be a priority task for the 2025/26 winter season.

Funding

BSAWG is a volunteer citizen's group, and with the exception of one part-time contract employee, none of our Board members are compensated for the many hours of work they put in each year. Making Alberton a Bear Smart Community, however, does take money. To date that funding has come from grants.

BSAWG began 2025 with \$6,908.15 on hand from prior year grants by People and Carnivores, Vital Ground, and the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. Additional grants were received during the year as follows:

- ◆ America the Beautiful Challenge grant (From National Fish and Wildlife Foundation through Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and Heart of the Rockies Initiative) – grant #1 for \$50,000 and grant #2 for \$77,400. (<https://www.nfwf.org/>)
- ◆ Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative - \$2,500 (www.y2y.net)
- ◆ Missoula Bears - \$1,000 (www.gofundme.com/f/help-make-missoula-mt-bearsmart)

The Yellowstone to Yukon and Missoula Bears funding is flexible to use as needed for our Bear Smart Alberton programs. The America the Beautiful Challenge grant funding is designated for specific purposes. Since this grant source represents the preponderance of our funding, a more in-depth explanation is provided below.

The America the Beautiful Challenge (AtBC) program is administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). NFWF is a private nonprofit organization chartered by Congress in 1984 for the purpose of restoring and conserving fish and wildlife habitats. Grants under the AtBC program are federal grants to NFWF which are then re-granted to states, tribes, and nonprofit conservation organizations. The funding Bear Smart Alberton received through the AtBC program came first to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP). MFWP developed an agreement with Heart of the Rockies Initiative, a nonprofit conservation organization, to accept and evaluate competitive AtBC grant applications and then award and administer grant funding. Bear Smart Alberton was one of several entities within the State of Montana to receive a portion of these grant funds. To date, AtBC grant funding in Montana has come in two phases. Phase 1 grants were awarded in May 2025 and Bear Smart Alberton received \$50,000. Phase 2 grants were awarded in November 2025 and Bear Smart Alberton received \$77,400. Funds awarded in both phases must be used by July 2027. Expenditure of the funds began in 2025 and will continue into 2027.

The combined Phase 1 and Phase 2 funding total of \$127,400 is designated for the following purposes:

- \$62,600 for staff capacity
- \$4,000 for outreach and education
- \$60,800 for bear-resistant garbage infrastructure and community attractant management

BSAWG is not a nonprofit organization, so any grants we receive must be administered through a nonprofit fiscal sponsor. Heart of the Rockies Initiative was our fiscal sponsor during 2023, 2024, and part of 2025. During 2025, we transitioned that role to the Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation who serves as our current fiscal sponsor. We are grateful to both organizations for assisting our Alberton efforts in the important role of fiscal sponsorship.

Program of Work

The work of making Alberton a Bear Smart Community is complex, involving many interrelated tasks. These include outreach, information and education designed to inform the public and gain acceptance of the program. It also includes coordinating with a host of collaborators ranging from local, state and federal government agencies, to business, industrial, and education partners, non-government conservation organizations, and the media. These things alone, however, would not make Alberton a Bear Smart Community. Perhaps the most important work of all is the on-the-ground work of eliminating or reducing the human-provided attractants that draw bears into the community. The sections below discuss the work accomplished in 2025 in categories that align with the funding designations identified previously.

1. Building Staff Capacity

Part of our funding is designated for building staff capacity to supplement ongoing volunteer efforts to make Alberton a Bear Smart Community. Under the AtBC grant funding in phase 1, we hired a part-time Community Coordinator to perform coordination and public education activities, manage bear attractant reduction projects, and conduct administrative tasks such as grant and report writing. Under phase 2, we increased the Community Coordinator’s time from 12 to 15 hours per week and also increased her hourly pay to be more on par with similar positions elsewhere. Also with phase 2 funding, we intend to hire a part-time assistant to the Community Coordinator at five hours per week. This additional capacity has already proven invaluable as a supplement to the volunteer efforts of the Board of Directors.

2. Public Outreach, Information and Education

Numerous public outreach and information and education activities were conducted in 2025. The events were tailored to specific audiences within a broad spectrum of age groups and backgrounds. The events included information on the efforts to make Alberton a Bear Smart Community, bear identification, bear biology and behavior, and bear safety. In total, approximately 1,000 people were reached during the year. The following is a list of events where Bear Smart Alberton was the main or a participating presenter.



Alberton School students learn about bears at Brovold Community Orchard.

When	Venue, Sponsor or Audience	No. People
March	Alberton Town Council formal annual update	30
April	Alberton Earth Day	25

July	Alberton Railroad Day booth	200
September	Mineral Co. Cons. Dist. 5 th Grade Conservation Day	100
September	Brovold Orchard Alberton School event	80
October	Alberton Farmer's Market	20
November	Alberton School 4 presentations in 4 days to K-6 library classes and 8 th grade science class	80

During the year we posted meeting announcements and updates on the Bear Smart Alberton (www.facebook.com/bearsmartalberton/) and Alberton Community (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/109795785765347/>) Facebook pages and created a Bear Smart Alberton Instagram page (www.instagram.com/bearsmartalberton/). We maintained an email mailing list (bearsmartalberton@gmail.com) of 63 individuals where we distributed meeting notices and updates. Other information and education activities included inventorying our information and education materials and ordering additional supplies as needed.

3. Conflict Reduction Work

With residential garbage being the most abundant bear attractant in Alberton, direct conflict reduction work in 2025 focused on replacing standard garbage containers with bear-resistant containers. This work utilized funds from Phase 1 of the AtBC grant. Eighty-seven Toter brand 96-gallon fully automated bear-resistant garbage containers were ordered at a cost of \$21,750. Republic Services donated additional funding of more than \$6,000 for shipping. This brand and model of container was selected for its cost effectiveness, simplicity of its latching mechanism, and its bear-resistant certification by IGBC. The containers are expected to arrive in early 2026, when they will be distributed to residents in the portion of Alberton north of Railroad Avenue. This area was selected because this is the location where most bears enter town. Residents receiving the containers will not see any increase in their garbage service bills.



Toter fully automated bear-resistant cart.

Republic Services estimated in 2024 that there were 394 non-bear-resistant garbage containers on their Alberton route. This encompasses an area larger than the Alberton town limits but still considered a part of the Alberton community. The 87 containers provided under Phase 1 of the AtBC grant leaves a balance of 307 standard containers needing to be replaced with bear-resistant containers. Fortunately, Phase 2 of the AtBC grant contains funding for an additional 150 containers. Additionally, the Phase 2 grant agreement stipulates that if Bear Smart Alberton is successful in distributing the 87 containers in Phase 1 and ordering the 150 containers in Phase 2 by June 1, 2026, funding will be provided for another 150 containers. If accomplished, this will essentially provide the entire greater Alberton community with bear-resistant garbage containers. Bear Smart Alberton is working with Republic Services and the community on solutions for larger garbage containers, such as the round, black 300 gallon containers, for which there is not currently a commercial bear-resistant option.

Challenges in 2025

The rapid expansion of any program brings certain logistical and administrative challenges that must be overcome. These types of challenges were faced by Bear Smart Alberton in 2025. Challenges like how to better organize to be effective, how to handle relatively large amounts of grant funding through a fiscal sponsor, how to hire an employee, and how to acquire large quantities of garbage containers took a lot of thought and collaboration. In the end, each problem was solved without too much difficulty, leading to great progress for the year.

A significant challenge to making Alberton a Bear Smart Community remains to be inspiring more community residents to become involved in the program. Bears have been coming into Alberton for a long time, and unless there is an imminent threat, most people don't see it as a big enough issue to become personally involved. If asked, most will say they think something should be done about the bears in Alberton, but when it comes to doing something about it themselves, most people have other priorities for how they spend their limited time and resources. Some progress was made in engaging more people in 2025, and our hope is that with continued public outreach and education, many more people will want to become involved.

Looking Ahead to 2026

The year 2025 saw good progress in making Alberton a Bear Smart Community, yet much remains to be done. Some things we would like to accomplish in 2026 include:

- Continue public outreach, information, and education work in the community, leading to increased public understanding, interest, and participation in the Bear Smart Alberton program.
- Continue and complete the distribution of bear-resistant garbage containers in the greater Alberton community.
- Prepare an effective draft garbage ordinance for Alberton, and work with town government to finalize and adopt the ordinance.
- Further address other (non-garbage) bear attractants in Alberton through measures such as education, electric fencing, and a fruit gleaning program.

Conclusion

BSAWG would like to thank the many partners who helped make our work in Alberton successful in 2025. Thank you to the Alberton Mayor and Town Council for adopting Alberton's Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan and for committing to be an active partner in implementing it. Thank you to those who have provided the much-needed grant funding that is allowing us to make real progress on important Alberton work. Thank you to our other partners who have provided counsel and helped with many of our educational events. And thanks most of all to the people of the Alberton community who have shown tolerance, understanding, and support as we go about the important work of making Alberton a Bear Smart Community.