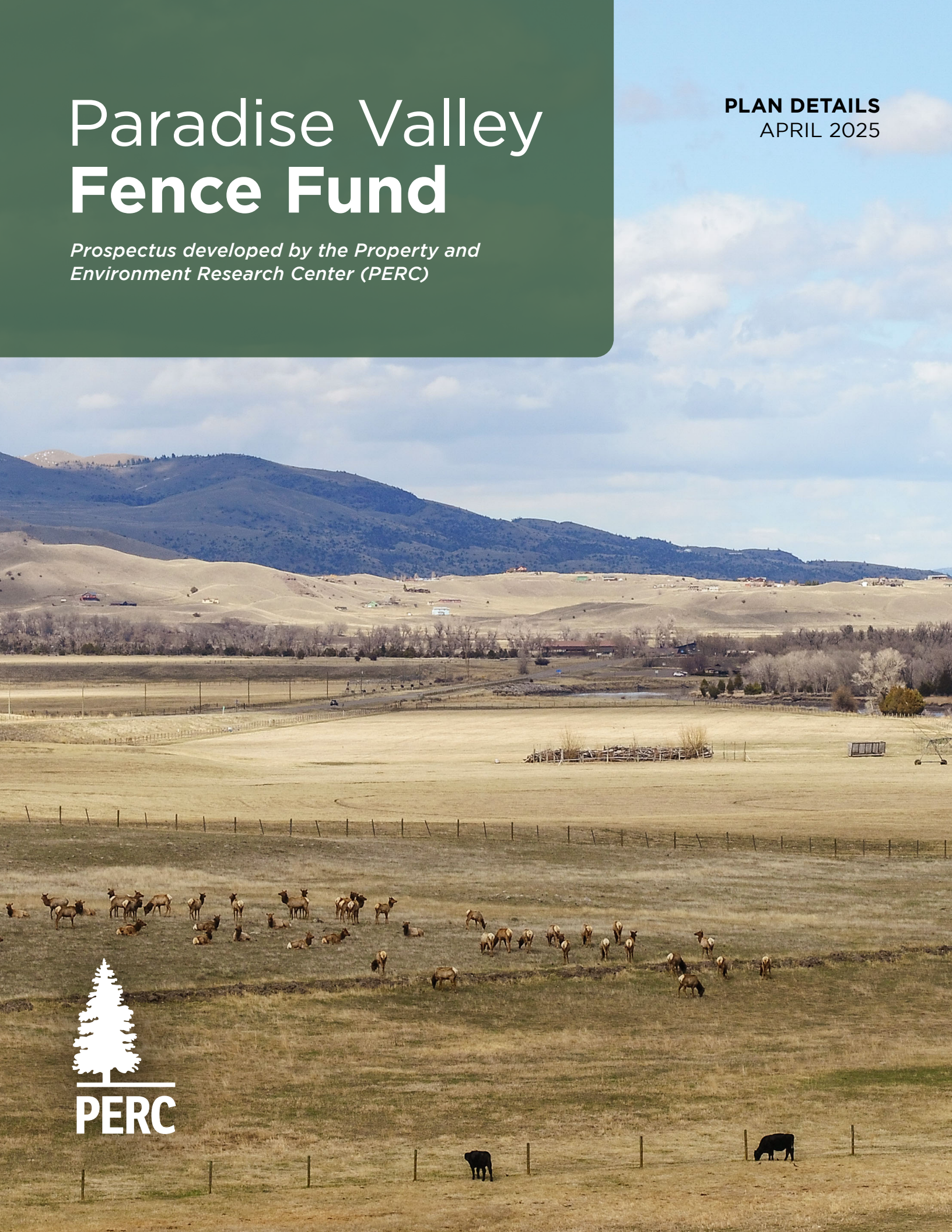


Paradise Valley Fence Fund

*Prospectus developed by the Property and
Environment Research Center (PERC)*

PLAN DETAILS
APRIL 2025



INTRODUCTION

Montana's Paradise Valley is a rural landscape with deep-rooted ranching traditions, wide open vistas, and ample recreational opportunities. Surrounded by the Custer Gallatin National Forest and Yellowstone National Park, Paradise Valley and its ranching community provide habitat for abundant populations of wildlife, ranging from elk and pronghorn to gray wolves and grizzly bears. Private landowners in Paradise Valley play a critical role in providing winter and year-round habitat for migratory and resident wildlife populations. If these private working lands are not economically viable, then exurban development (e.g., subdivision) and other land conversions will likely accelerate land-use intensity and conversion, making wildlife habitat conservation more challenging in the future.

Much of the responsibility and financial burden for providing the region's essential wildlife habitat falls on the valley's private landowners. PERC's *Elk in Paradise, Conserving Migratory Wildlife and Working Lands in Montana's Paradise Valley* (2020) examined landowner attitudes toward their land, livelihoods, and wildlife. Asked what keeps Paradise Valley ranchers up at night, the overwhelming

response was "elk" as they present significant challenges for landowners including disease transmission, competition with livestock for forage, and damage to fences. Magnifying the impacts, landowners observe that elk overall are spending more and more time on private lands and in greater numbers, and many landowners feel that the public benefits they provide to wildlife are taken for granted by state and federal land management agencies, hunters, and the public that shape wildlife policies.

"I'm more than just another stakeholder, it's my land and my livelihood."

– Paradise Valley Rancher

Creating Incentives for Paradise Valley Landowners

Recognizing that elk and other wildlife impose real costs on agricultural operators and other landowners, PERC is working to provide tangible incentives for landowners bearing the cost of providing wildlife habitat. Specifically, PERC's Conservation Innovation Lab is focused on developing and piloting a range of incentives, including: 1) Elk Occupancy Agreements, 2) Brucellosis Compensation Fund, and 3) Payments for Presence, and 4) a Paradise Valley Fence Fund.

Why a Fence Fund?

From research and conversations with landowners in Paradise Valley, the issue of wildlife-related property damage is recognized as a significant concern. And wildlife, especially elk, perennially damaging fences was a top concern. As a group, 93% indicated that they suffer regular/perennial damage to fences on their property with the vast majority of damage attributed to elk. In addition, as grizzly bears continue to expand their range, there is increasing a need to fence off attractants (i.e., bone yards, grain stores, bee hives) to prevent bear-human conflicts.

"Hundreds of elk will take out five spans of fence at a time. Elk are present October through May. They take out some fence every time. It may just be a broken wire, or it may be posts broken and wire laid flat. Whatever they do, it has to be fixed."

THE FUND

The Paradise Valley Fence Fund is a concrete demonstration that the burden of ranchers living with wildlife can be shared by parties interested in supporting and enhancing elk and wildlife habitat.

The Fund is a three-year pilot project, launched in January 2025. The ultimate size and scope of the Fence Fund will depend on garnering the interest and support of landowners to reduce wildlife damage and conflicts, and hinge on PERC’s ability to raise the necessary funds from individuals, foundations, industry, and conservation organizations who wish to demonstrate their collective interest in preserving working lands and their vital contributions to wildlife conservation.

Initially capitalized at \$50,000, the fund will provide support to help cover the costs associated with repairing, rebuilding, and replacing wildlife-damaged fencing, promoting “Gates Open for Wildlife,” and fencing off grizzly bear attractants in Paradise Valley, with the goal of covering approximately 30-50% of ranchers’ costs, with the rancher responsible for covering the remainder as a cost share.

The Fence Fund provides assistance to:

- **REPAIR/MODIFY/CONVERT** fences to hold livestock in but prevent, or at least lessen, the need for continued repair and replacement and impacts to wildlife.
- **PROMOTE** wildlife access through ranch gates through volunteer signage program.
- **PREVENT** large carnivore conflicts by installing electric fences around ranch bone piles and other attractants.
- **CONNECT** landowners with other organizations providing technical support, volunteers, and other assistance.



FINANCIAL SUPPORT

For the sake of clarity and simplicity, the Fence Fund provides the following levels of support:

A. Fencing Repair and Replacement

Level 1. Basic Repairs. Fence owner undertakes basic fence repairs with total time and materials estimated at up to \$2,500.

Fence Fund Support = ≤ \$750 (≥30%).

Level 2. Traditional Fence Replacement. The condition of landowner’s existing fence and level of wildlife caused damage requires repairs to one or more spans of fence with total time and materials estimated at \$2,500 to \$10,000.

Fence Fund Support = \$750-\$2,500 (25-30% of overall project costs).

Level 3. Fence Conversion. Existing fence condition and location clearly impacted by wildlife requiring rebuild of existing fence and replacement with wildlife-friendly design to mitigate ongoing fence damage from wildlife. Total time and materials in excess of \$10,000.

Fence Fund Support = \$5,000 (based on project need and fund availability).

B. Fencing of Grizzly Bear Attractants

Fence Fund will work with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and other partners to construct electric fencing around bone piles, unsecured grain stores, and other grizzly bear attractants.

Fence Fund Support = 50-100% of producer’s costs (up to \$1,000 per landowner).

C. Gate Signs

One of the simplest ways to provide wildlife passage and reduce fence damage is to leave gates open when livestock is not present.

Fence Fund Support = “Gate Open for Wildlife Signs” provided to all interested landowners at no cost.

GATE OPEN FOR WILDLIFE

NO ENTRY

This gate has been left open to help wildlife passage.

PARADISE VALLEY WORKING LANDS GROUP

Figure 1. One of the easiest ways to prevent fence damage from wildlife is to leave ranch gates open when stock are not present. For many landowners, however, an open gate leads to unwanted human access. To this end, a series of signs have been developed to promote “Gate open for wildlife.”

HOW TO APPLY

There is no formal enrollment process access the Fence Fund and no payment required from landowners. As it is anticipated that demand may outpace supply, a straightforward set of eligibility criteria, described in the following section, will be used to help rank requests and determine level of funding support.

Eligibility

The landowner/operator:

- Manages an agricultural operation in the Paradise Valley.
- Documents the nature and location of fencing need (e.g., photos/video/site visit).
- Participates in the meetings and activities of the Paradise Valley Working Lands Group (attending at least 1-2 meetings per year).
- Adheres to applicable rules associated with operating in the Montana Designated Surveillance Area (DSA), including any required vaccinations, testing, and adherence to brucellosis management plans.

Process

1. An eligible landowner submits a request by contacting Whitney Tilt, PERC's Paradise Valley coordinator (wtilt@perc.org, 406-223-8972).
2. The landowner will be requested to fill out a simple form providing: a) contact information, b) description of requested fence repair/rebuild, c) estimated project costs, d) one or more photos of damage or attractant (i.e., bone pile), and e) the level of support requested.
3. Requests will be reviewed by PERC and on approval will be provided a simple contract affirming agreement to maintain the improvements and document improvements (photos, video, testimonials) to help PERC tell the story to donors. A check will then be sent to owner who acknowledges receipt. Gate signs will be available free of charge at PVWLG meetings and UYWG Coordinator's office.

Given that demand is anticipated to outstrip available funding, eligible landowners are asked to limit requests to one per calendar year.



Photo: Wes Overvold

Cover Photo: Wes Overvold

If you are interested in learning more, contact PERC's Paradise Valley Coordinator, Whitney Tilt, at WTilt@perc.org or 406-223-8972.



The Property and Environment Research Center (PERC) is the national leader in market solutions for conservation. Through research, law and policy, and innovative applied conservation programs, PERC explores how aligning incentives for environmental stewardship produces sustainable outcomes for land, water, and wildlife. Founded in 1980, PERC is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and proudly based in Bozeman, Montana.

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