



What's a Bear-Resistant Cooler Anyway?

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By **Kathy**

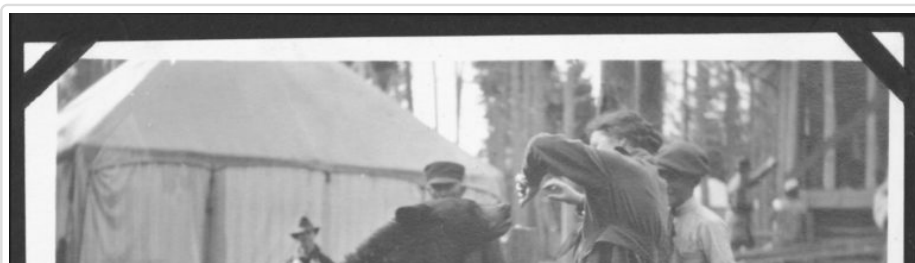
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Ever see the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) “Certified Bear Resistant” logo and wonder what that means? I did a little digging to discover the backstory and found some interesting info behind this stamp of approval. It’s a little blending of park management history meets product development. And it makes perfect sense, both for humans and the grizzly bear population.



Introducing IGBC: The history of organization behind the product testing

Back in the early days of Yellowstone National Park’s existence, both black and grizzly bears feasted regularly on trash found in the dumpsters behind the lodges and the many open-pit dump areas located throughout the park. In fact, park officials used to make a nightly “show” of the bears rummaging through the garbage contents. Log bleachers were set out at various dump stations where hundreds of park visitors sat to view the feeding frenzy.



Despite a rule set in 1902 prohibiting bear feeding, park visitors were known to pull over along park roads and hand feed the bears.



Woman hand feeding two bears at Yellowstone National Park. American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming

Before the 1970s, there was very little known about bears. Yellowstone National Park didn't have a formalized bear research or management program. "Bear management," like human/bear interactions causing injuries or death, were dealt with by the park ranger division whose

normal duty was law enforcement and resource protection. Instead of focusing on long-term management practices, they took care of problems as they came up. And come up, they did. According to the Yellowstone National Park website, from 1931-1969, an average of 48 humans a year were injured by bear, and more than 100 incidents of property damage occur annually.

Fast forward to 1963, the year an advisory board for the National Park Service released the **Leopold Report**. The report encouraged national parks everywhere to implement management principles that kept the park system as natural as possible. They recommended minimizing or removing any object from the park that showed human intervention. Fences should be removed to leave the park in its wild state. Sights and sounds of human intervention should be reduced, like chainsaws, tractors, machinery, etc. The report also suggested that wildlife should no longer eat human leftovers, but should return to their natural predator/prey feeding habits. The report discouraged "artificial feeding" because "fed bears become bums, and dangerous, Fed elk deplete natural ranges."

This started a discussion in Yellowstone National Park about what to do with the park dump stations. According to one report, an estimate of up to 100 grizzly bears fed off the Trout Creek dump contents alone (2008 Yellowstone Science). Some early researchers thought the dump stations actually reduced human/bear conflict as it supplied them with an attractive food source. They suggested if the dumps were to be closed, close them slowly over a period of 10 years so the bears could slowly wean off dump food while supplementing it with natural food.

Despite that viewpoint, the Yellowstone National Park superintendent closed the last two remaining



Feeding the bear, Yellowstone National Park. American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

open-pit garbage dumps stations in 1970—and both black bears and grizzlies were blocked from their once easily obtained human food source. 1970 was a difficult time for park officials who had to continually relocate problem bears that rummaged through garbage cans at camp, through coolers, and inside of cars through open windows for their dinnertime fix. Those that kept returning to these human food sources had to be relocated to zoos, or killed.

A few years after the 1970 dump closings, a study showed a rapid population decline of the Yellowstone grizzly bear. This led to the Department of Interior forming the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team (IGBST) in 1973. The group was tasked with studying the remaining grizzly bear population to better understand it.

In 1980, The IGBST released research that confirmed the rapid grizzly population decline. Because of that study, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) was formed in 1983. Its job was to ensure the grizzly bear recovery through interagency coordination of policy, planning, management and research. One way it did this was by developing a food-storage order for federal lands inhabited by grizzlies. The committee also started the bear-resistant container testing program on behalf of the U.S. Forest Service.

The Test: Where and How

If you enter Yellowstone National Park through the West Entrance, you're only 0.7 miles away from the **Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center** located in West Yellowstone. It serves as a sanctuary for wolves and grizzlies that for various reasons can no longer survive in the wild. This is where IGBC conducts its bear-resistant container and cooler testing program. Grizzlies that do the product testing were bears that may have otherwise been killed due to repeated problematic human/bear interactions, like dumpster diving into trash bins for leftover scraps. The Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center also serves as an educational hub for teaching the public about living and recreating safely in wolf and bear country.

Have you heard that slogan, “a fed bear is a dead bear”? That came from park management educational material to teach visitors not to feed bears, or they'll become food conditioned. Bears are incredibly smart—and will take the path of least resistance to nourish themselves. Once they feed off of human food, they'll return to the food source time and again to get a second helping. A bear that exhibits this behavior within a Park System is most likely relocated to remote areas in the park. If the behavior continues, or the bear becomes aggressive toward humans, the bear is killed. Part of IGBC's goal is to reduce this human/bear conflict. These sanctuary bears not only serve as ambassadors to educate the public, but they are used for bear-resistant cooler/containment product testing. The IGBC certified bear resistant logo lets consumers know the cooler (or other bear-resistant product) keeps food inaccessible to bears, which deters them from becoming human-food dependent.

IGBC Product Testing Protocol

Cooler manufacturers' that want to become bear-resistant certified send in their cooler (or other product) to the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center for a live bear testing. Once the product is on site, a tester places a food attractant inside the cooler, padlocks it closed, and then places it inside the bear enclosure. A live bear is allowed to interact with the filled cooler until 1) it successfully breaks into it, or 2) the cooler remains intact after 60 minutes of interaction. Within that 60-minute period, the bear is allowed to swat at it, pound on it, gnaw at the edges—or whatever it takes to get inside. If the cooler remains mostly in-tact after 60 minutes, the cooler earns its stripes.

One tiny caveat that's often overlooked. If a product passes testing, it doesn't mean the cooler/container is bear-*proof*—and that a bear will *never* get inside. It means that the cooler is considered to be enough of a deterrent to thwart the bear from feeding on the attractant.

Planning on visiting a public land inhabited by grizzly bears? It most likely requires an IGBC-certified container that meets food storage regulations. The Guide Gear Cooler meets that requirement. **Get yours here.**

Timeline

1963: Advisory Board for National Park Service releases, “Wildlife Management in the National Parks: The Leopold Report,” which recommends removal of human influence on wildlife populations and return to predator/prey relationships

1967: Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Anderson begins implementing recommendations from the Leopold Report

1970: Controversial park closure of open-pit dumps in Yellowstone to wean bears off garbage abruptly rather than slowly, which led to more bear deaths due to underestimating their reliability on the dump food source

1968-71: Approx. 140 grizzly bear deaths attributed to human causes after municipal dump closures within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem

1973: As a direct result, Rogers C. B. Morton of the Department of Interior forms a group of scientists known as the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team (IGBST) to study data collected on the grizzly bear population in Yellowstone

Mid 1970s: 136 grizzly bears were thought to remain in Yellowstone. Prior to dump closures, the population was estimated at 234 bears

1975: Grizzly bears in the lower 48 states are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act

1980: Research by the IGBST shows continued grizzly population decline

1983: This leads to the forming of Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC), which includes administrators from federal and state agencies. Their job was to implement regulations on federal lands that would help reduce human-caused grizzly bear mortality. This includes food-storage orders

1989: IGBC develops the first consistent protocol for defining, testing and recommending minimum design standards for bear-resistant containers (USFS 1989)

1993: Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan is established, which guides management principles when the grizzly is on the threatened species list. Grizzly/human conflict management and bear habitat management are high priorities in the recovery zone

Other Reading/Resources:

Meet the IGBC Product Testers

Food Storage Regulation Map

Visiting somewhere that's inhabited by grizzly bears? Check out **this map** to see if there are food storage regulations in place.

Video of IGBST bear recovery accomplishments

Return of the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear



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