

# Winter Wheelin' in Wyoming

A cold-weather driving guide  
Includes statewide snow-control priority plan

# Wyoming snow-control priorities plan and map

## Traffic volumes determine snow-control priorities

When storms hit, WYDOT maintenance crews are on the road applying a salt-sand mixture to improve traction and plowing when needed.

Using information provided by a network of weather monitoring sensors in the road surface at remote locations and a growing network of Web camera views, maintenance crews can observe conditions and be on the scene when a storm begins, putting down a timely application of sand-salt mixture and in some cases liquid deicers to forestall the accumulation of ice and snow.

WYDOT crews have more than 400 conventional snow plows across the state and 18 snow-blowing rotary plows they can throw into the battle.

At that point, the department's statewide snow-removal plan goes into effect. It establishes sanding and plowing priorities for the system of interstate, arterial and collector routes, based on the relative amounts of traffic the highways carry. Four levels of service have been established.

**High volume (IA, IB)** service is provided on interstates and principal arterial and urban routes. If necessary, crews will work up to 24 hours (IA)

or 20 hours (IB) a day to maintain a bare roadway for driving safely at reasonable speeds.

**Medium volume (II)** service is provided on lesser-used arterial routes. The goal is to keep the roadway passable for drivers who are taking reasonable winter driving precautions, although with less emphasis on keeping the pavement bare.

**Low volume (IIIA, IIIB)** service generally involves other less-traveled minor arterial and collector routes and is provided after high-volume and medium-volume routes have been cleared, with exceptions sometimes made for routes that carry school buses or similar traffic. Low-volume

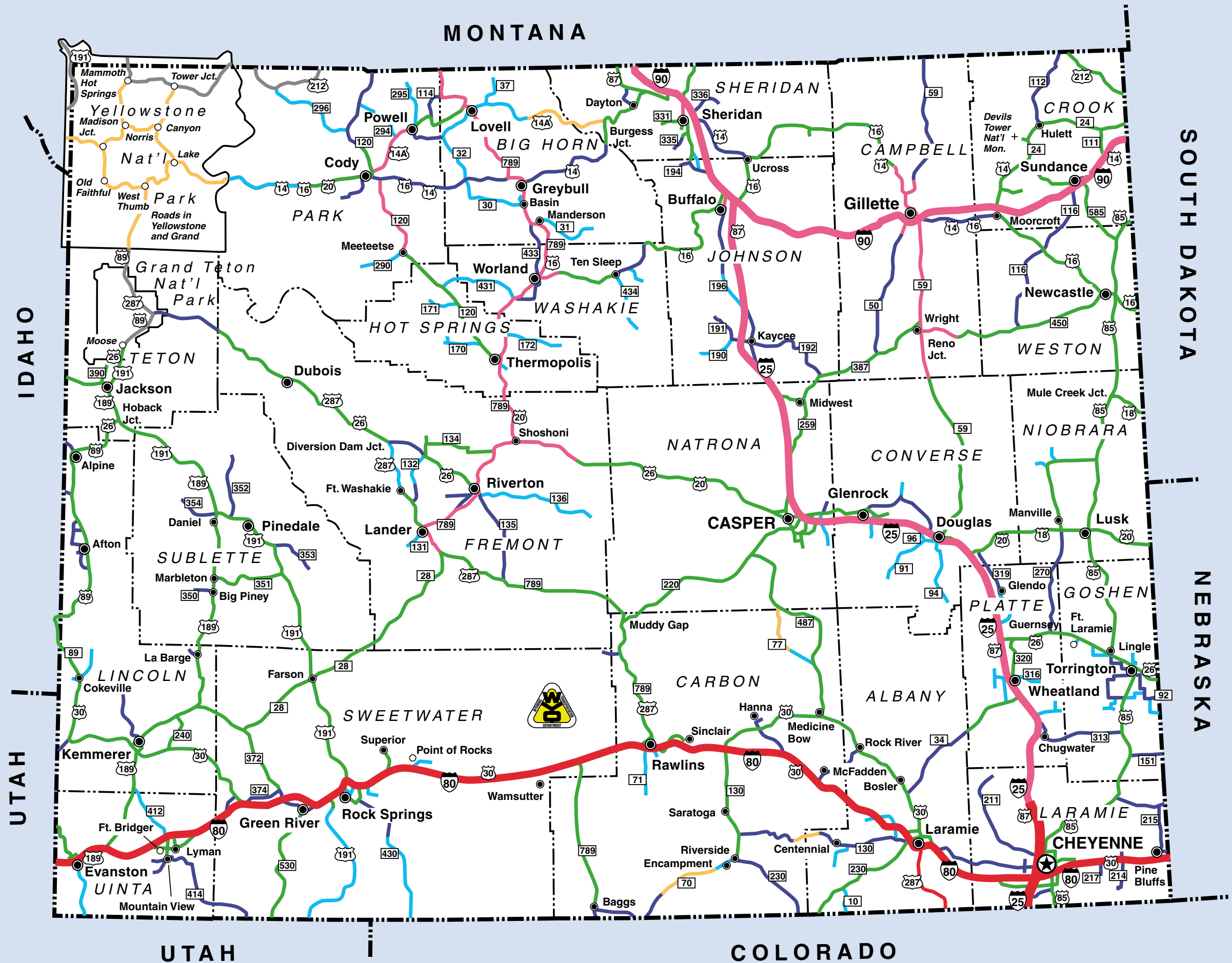
service is provided only during daylight hours. Level IIIB state highways receive minimum levels of service as resources become available.

During severe storms, scheduling depends on available personnel and equipment. Roads tagged for high volume service will be plowed first; medium and low volume highways will be handled as soon as possible thereafter.

As bad weather clears, cleanup is undertaken only after all roads have been provided with their designated levels of service.

## Service-level classifications (Subject to change)

High volume IA	Red	Medium volume II	Green	Low volume IIIA	Dark Blue
High volume IB	Pink	Closed IV	Yellow	Low volume IIIB	Light Blue
		Not plowed by WYDOT	Grey		



Motorists in Wyoming can call 511 for timely road condition information. Those outside Wyoming can dial 888-WYO-ROAD (888-996-7623).

The 511 Web site at [www.wyoroad.info](http://www.wyoroad.info) provides a list of road closures and advisories, Web camera views of actual conditions, weather sensor readings, a map depicting road and atmospheric conditions around the state and text listings of those conditions by highway section.

### 511 Notify

Commuters can subscribe to receive automatic e-mail and text notifications of highway closures, reopenings and travel advisories on specific highway sections through the 511 Notify service. You can find out more about the service and sign up for it online at [www.wyoroad.info/511/511NotifyAnnouncement](http://www.wyoroad.info/511/511NotifyAnnouncement).

### WYDOT Authorized Travel

Motorists also can apply for authorization for local travel on specific closed highway sections if the problem necessitating the closure lies beyond their destination. More information on the WAT program is available at [wat.wyoroad.info/wat](http://wat.wyoroad.info/wat).



# Winter Wheelin' in Wyoming



## Be prepared before the storms arrive

**B**ecause winter storms can develop quickly in Wyoming, it's wise to be prepared.

Make sure your car is running smoothly and check the brakes. Inflate your tires to the pressure recommended by the vehicle and tire manufacturers. Letting air out of tires increases wear and doesn't improve traction. Putting sand bags or concrete blocks in the trunk or bed of a pickup doesn't necessarily increase traction, and may increase the danger of skidding, particularly if it is not distributed evenly and secured in place.

Replace old windshield wiper blades and make sure your windshield cleaning fluid has antifreeze. Top off your fuel tank often. Running out of fuel is a calamity that's easy to avoid. Don't carry filled portable gasoline containers. They increase the chance of explosion in a collision.

Make sure the oil and other fluids are full. Check lights

and turn signals. Keep all lights free of ice and snow, and use low beams when driving through blowing snow.

Subzero temperatures are common in wintertime Wyoming. Familiarize yourself with the procedure recommended in your vehicle owner's manual for starting the engine in such adverse conditions. The manual also should include recommendations for warming up the engine, but some warm-up may also be needed to defrost the windshield before you get on the road.

Remember to clean snow off your shoes before you get in the vehicle. Snow on your shoes can make your accelerator and brake pedals slippery, creating a safety hazard.

Seat belts save lives, but only if they are used. About 70 percent of those killed on Wyoming roads each year are not wearing seat belts. Be sure to fasten seat belts and put children in proper safety restraints before going anywhere, no matter how short the trip.

## Ice and snow can make driving a challenge

**I**f you encounter ice or snow on the road, slow down. Touch your brake pedal to test your vehicle's traction under the conditions. Drive slowly and in full control of your vehicle.

Be alert for ice on bridges, overpasses and in shaded areas where it can remain even after the sun comes out and temperatures warm. Black ice is invisible on the road, so always watch for sudden changes in road-surface conditions. There may be sharp transitions on the pavement, from merely wet, to extremely icy. These changes occur most frequently on bridge decks, overpasses, high fills, in deep cuts, near snow fences or at the end of guardrails or median barriers. Thawing temperatures can leave a thin film of water over melting ice, making it even more hazardous.

Getting your vehicle moving on snow and ice requires pointing front wheels straight ahead and carefully accelerating. Using first gear in a standard transmission or low in an automatic can give you too much power, causing wheels to spin. Rely on second gear or "drive" in an automatic, for safer starts.

Four-wheel-drive and front-wheel-drive vehicles generally allow better traction on snow and ice, but they have limitations. Particularly in the case of front-wheel-drive vehicles, skids can easily result when downshifting too quickly. A quick release of the accelerator pedal also can result in engine compression that may stop the drive wheels and cause a skid. Four-wheel-drive vehicles with a high center of gravity are more likely to roll during a skid.

Whatever your vehicle type, it will take longer to stop. Increase your following distances to at least four seconds between you and the vehicle in front of you. To adjust your

following distance, allow the vehicle ahead to pass a landmark, and then count the seconds until you pass the same landmark. If you reach the landmark before four seconds, you are following too closely.

Locked wheels and skids result when drivers jam on conventional brakes. Pumping those brakes often is required to stop safely and smoothly in slippery conditions. If your vehicle has antilock brakes, they will do the pumping automatically, so firm, steady pressure on the brake pedal will bring your vehicle to the quickest stop.

Keeping your speed down on a slippery road will mean stopping won't take as long, and the risk of skidding will be reduced. If you begin to skid, gently turn into the skid and ease your foot off the accelerator until you regain control.

Icy roads topped by a blowing ground blizzard make for double trouble. Slow down, but keep moving and don't panic. Don't do anything quickly. Any steering or braking should be gentle and gradual. If you lose your bearings, lower the window and look for the center stripe or the edge of the road to determine where you are.

Most of all, be patient when driving on ice or snow. If the vehicle in front of you spins out on an icy hill, stay in line. Wait for a snowplow to clear the way. You'll get through much quicker.

If you stop to help someone who has slid off the road or been in a crash due to ice, be careful. Park well away, and, as you help, be alert and ready to get out of the way should anyone else lose control of their vehicle at the same icy location.



**W**inter storms strike quickly across Wyoming's high plains and mountains. When they do, driving conditions can deteriorate rapidly and become very challenging. Drivers must be prepared, cautious and patient to get safely to their destinations in those conditions.

This brochure provides information on preparing vehicles for a typical winter trip in Wyoming and drive safely in storms.

## Know and obey the law

### Chain law

Wyoming's chain law includes two levels of restrictions that can be implemented on specific highway sections when conditions warrant.

#### Level 1

When conditions are hazardous, travel may be restricted to:

- Vehicles equipped with tire chains;
- Vehicles with adequate snow tires;
- All-wheel-drive vehicles; or
- Necessary emergency vehicles and snowplows.

#### Level 2

When conditions are extremely hazardous, travel can be restricted to:

- Vehicles equipped with tire chains;
- All-wheel-drive vehicles equipped with adequate mud and snow or all-weather rated tires; or
- Necessary emergency vehicles and snowplows.

Commercial vehicles must have chains on at least two drive wheels at opposite ends of the same drive axle.

Do not stop in the driving lane to install or remove chains!

#### Penalties for violations:

- \$250 for violating the travel restriction; or
- \$750 for a violation that results in a road closure.

It includes a list of supplies motorists should carry with them through the winter season, and offers pointers for driving on snowy and icy highways. It also provides tips for motorists who find themselves stranded in a storm.

The snow-control priorities plan and map included show what level of snow-removal service is provided on each highway segment in the state.

### Road Closures

WYDOT, the Highway Patrol, police and sheriffs have authority to close roads whenever they consider it necessary for public health or safety. During the winter, this means highways can be closed due to crashes or because of ice, snow or poor visibility. Remember, although conditions may be favorable at the closure gate, conditions can be much different a few miles down the road.

Violating a road closure carries a penalty of up to a \$750 fine and 30 days in jail. However, the real danger of running a road closure gate is being injured in a crash or getting stranded and facing the risks of hypothermia or even freezing to death.



## Geographic variety affects winter driving

### East-West highways

East-west transcontinental routes traverse Wyoming in the north, central and southern portions of the state.

Interstate 80 crosses southern Wyoming's high plains, where winter wind is frequent and often causes ground blizzards and whiteout conditions.

The best option is to wait those out in the nearest town. However, if you are caught in a ground blizzard, stay calm, drive slowly and watch for other vehicles. Try your best to keep going, but, if you must stop, make sure you're well off the road to avoid being hit from behind.

Although I-80 primarily crosses long, flat expanses of plains, it's the highest section of I-80 in the nation, reaching 8,640 feet in elevation at the summit between Cheyenne and Laramie. Strong winds and blizzards are possibilities. In the west, between Fort Bridger and Evanston, there is a series of hills known as the Three Sisters that can become slick during storms.

In the north, US 14 and US 16 cross the Big Horn Mountains at above 9,000 feet. There are many curves and relatively steep grades. Expect to encounter snow and ice on the road. Adjust your driving accordingly, and make sure you have tire chains and know how to use them.

Be alert to the possibility of wildlife on the road. Many animals are attracted to the warmth of roads in winter.

## First-aid tips

**C**old weather, especially when endured for prolonged periods, can cause a variety of medical problems. The most common are:

**Frostbite** — Frostbite means skin tissue is freezing or has frozen and contains ice crystals. It appears as flushed skin turning white or yellowish. It is important to know frostbite victims don't necessarily feel cold.

Rapidly rewarm a frostbitten area by immersing in very warm (102- to 108-degree) water, by warm body contact or by wrapping in blankets, coats or clothing.

**Hypothermia** — Hypothermia is the excessive loss of body heat and can be diagnosed by a victim's numbness, shivering and drowsiness.

To prevent hypothermia, wear layered clothing made of wool, silk or a synthetic material such as polyester for greater insulation and protection from exposure. Avoid cotton garments.

To treat, gradually rewarm the victim using any available external heat source, such as the warm body of another. Unless hypothermia is severe, give the victim hot, nonalcoholic beverages. Handle a victim with care. They can be in shock, and shock increases the potential for heartbeat irregularities.

## In your trunk ...

Before traveling any significant distance in wintertime Wyoming, motorists should make sure they have the following items in their vehicles:

- Tire chains of the proper size;
- A shovel and small bag of sand or kitty litter to provide traction if your vehicle gets stuck;
- A snow brush and ice scraper;
- A can of deicer for frozen door locks and wiper blades;
- Blankets or sleeping bags;
- Water and dehydrated foods, in case you get stranded for an extended period;
- An emergency first-aid kit well stocked with medical supplies and bandages;
- Flares and flashlights for nighttime emergencies;
- Booster cables in case of a dead battery.



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