During summer months, a major undertaking for the Wyoming Department of Transportation is important road restoration work known as chip sealing. As funding levels have become more of a challenge, the department has focused more on rehabilitation and preservation of roads, working hard to avoid more costly reconstruction. And WYDOT Assistant Chief Engineer for Engineering and Planning Keith Fulton said that chip seals are “probably the most cost effective preservation treatment” that the department employs.

The department has nearly 10 percent less total revenue for 2017 than it had in 2010, yet construction costs have risen. Fulton said that a chip seal is about one-quarter of the cost of a typical overlay.

“It seals the surface, improves friction and extends the pavement life,” he said. “They’re applied to roads that are in good condition to keep them in good condition.”

The department currently has more than 100 miles of chip sealing projects on its construction report. The warm weather is important, Fulton said, because it helps with the application of the emulsion. The work is generally conducted when outside temperatures are at their highest, beginning in late June and extending through July and August.

Chip sealing consists of spraying liquid asphalt on the existing pavement, then topping the asphalt with gravel. The asphalt helps prevent moisture from penetrating into the pavement, slowing the formation of cracks and potholes. The gravel chips, which are pressed into the pavement, help provide a nonskid texture to the road surface. Sealing extends the life of a pavement by an estimated five-seven years.

WYDOT saves on costs with chip seals

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