

# Winter Wheelin' in Wyoming



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

## In your trunk ...

Before traveling any significant distance in wintertime in 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;
- A well-stocked emergency first-aid kit with medical supplies and bandages;
- Flares and flashlights for nighttime emergencies; and
- Booster cables in case of a dead battery.

## Winter storm driving preparation

- Make sure your car is running smoothly and check the brakes.
- Inflate your tires to the pressure recommended by the vehicle and tire manufacturers.
- 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.
- 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.



[www.wyoroad.info](http://www.wyoroad.info)

Scan to view online road information:



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 mobile app

Users are now able to download the Wyoming 511 mobile app from the Apple Store or Google Play. The app displays up-to-the-minute road and travel information.

## 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).



Published by the Public Affairs Office  
October 2020

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## Ice and snow hazards

If you encounter ice or snow on the road, slow down. 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.

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 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 anti-lock 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 reduce the risk of skidding. 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.

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.

## 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.

Driving through central Wyoming on US 26-287, you'll cross Togwotee Pass at an elevation of 9,658 feet. There is snow on the road throughout most of the winter, so drivers are advised to slow down, stay alert and proceed with caution.

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

### North-South highways

Four principal north-south routes cross Wyoming. Because the prevailing wind is from the west, drivers should be aware of strong crosswinds and limited visibility during storms on these roads.

Interstate 25 between Cheyenne and Buffalo crosses a wide variety of country, ranging from hills and valleys to vast prairies. US 85 from Cheyenne to the South Dakota border crosses country very similar to I-25, but, because it is primarily a two-lane road and not a divided highway, it requires even greater driving attention during bad weather.

There are broad plains in the Rawlins, Riverton and Casper areas. Canyon roads, hills and broad plains in the Big Horn Basin extend from Thermopolis to Lovell, Powell and Cody. Harsh driving conditions can exist across all these areas.

On US 89 in western Wyoming, there is a high mountain pass between Cokeville and Alpine. US 189-191 passes through in a deep canyon between Daniel and Hoback Junction. South Pass on WYO 28 between Farson and Lander reaches 7,550 feet in elevation.

# 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 cameras, 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, 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

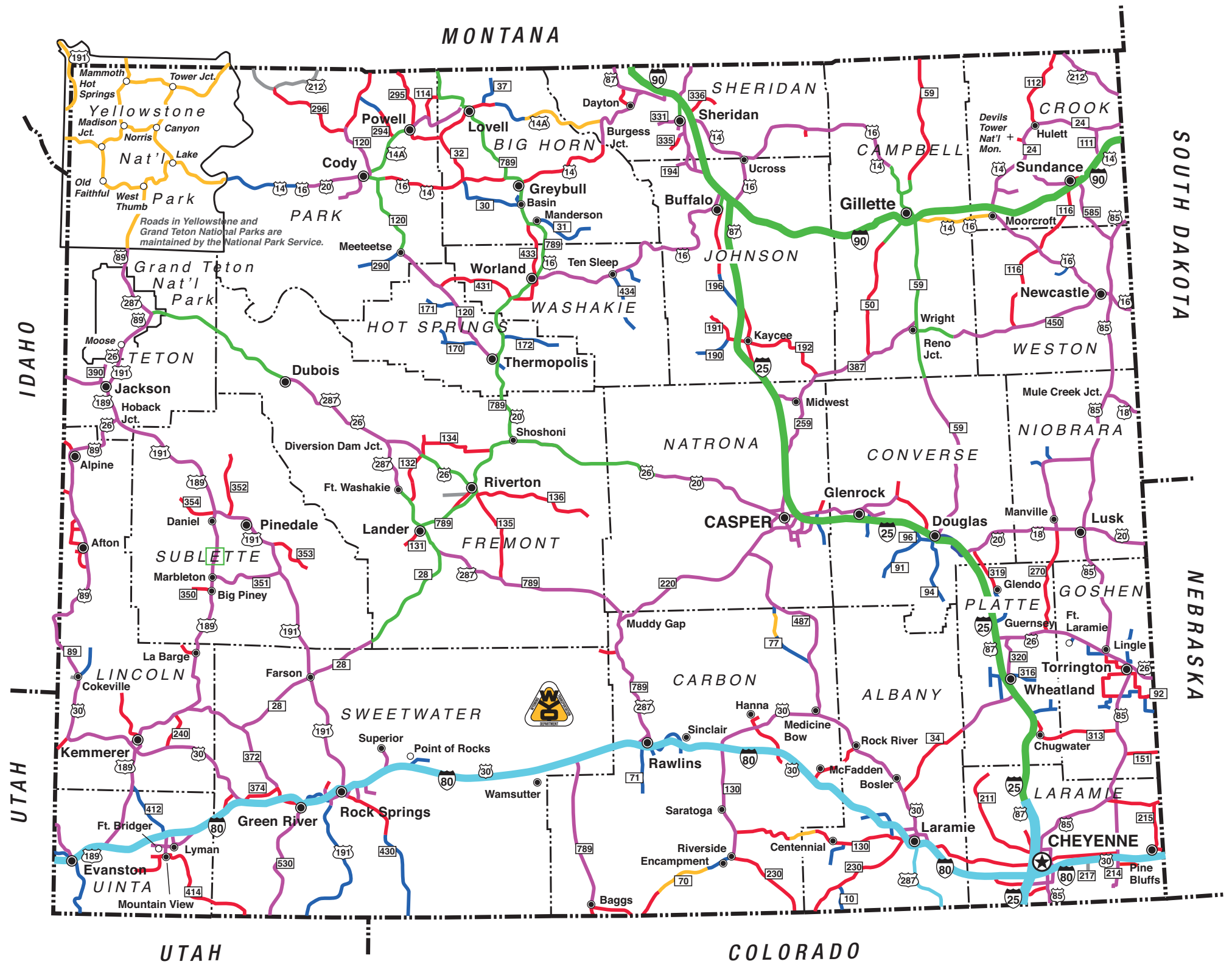
provided after high-volume and medium-volume routes have been cleared, with exceptions sometimes made for routes that carry school buses or similar traffic. Low-volume service is provided only during daylight hours. Level IIIB state highways receive minimum levels of service as resources become available.

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/24 hr.	I(A)		Medium volume/16 hr.	II		Low volume/As available	III(B)		Not plowed by WYDOT	
High volume/20 hr.	I(B)		Low volume/No drifting or ridges	III(A)		Closed Seasonally	IV			



## 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.

### Road Closures

WYDOT, the Wyoming 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.