



UIW

College of Agriculture
and Natural Resources
Extension
Crook County

You're Not From Around Here, Are You? Wyoming Ag Laws Explained

Westward expansion is not a new concept and the westward movement is trending again. As the number of out-of-state newcomers move in and set up residence, it is important to have knowledge about Wyoming agriculture laws and regulations that can be causes of upset and strife. After several sensational cases involving misunderstandings surrounding landowner rights and responsibilities, here are some common issues and ways to avoid trouble.

Good fences make good neighbors. This is a saying that is very common in Wyoming, but what does that mean? Wyoming is a fence out state. If you don't want livestock on your property, it is your responsibility as the landowner to provide the fence and upkeep. Wyoming state statutes read, "A stock owner is not liable for trespass or damage if a property is not adequately protected by a "lawful" fence." This law pertains to cattle and domestic bison. A lawful fence is constructed well enough to keep livestock out. A 3-strand barbed wire, board, pole, or rail fence are all acceptable. Sheep are a different story. Sheep must be fenced in. Additionally, it is unlawful for the owner of any swine, goats, domestic elk or exotic livestock to allow such animals to run at large within Wyoming. Exotic livestock means any nontraditional livestock animal including, llama, alpaca, and other camelids, ostrich, bison hybrids, and yaks. Any owner who permits or causes such animals to run at large within Wyoming, is liable for damages incurred by any person. If you are running animals, or buy property adjacent to anyone running animals, be diligent and you will be less likely to end up in court. And don't forget to close the gate! Leaving a gate open on a lawful fence, even if by accident, can result in a hefty fine up to \$750.

This takes us into "open range" territory. You will often see these signs on county roads or within public lands. Open range means free grazing on unfenced acres, mostly public land. For the public, this means that if you hit livestock with your vehicle in posted open range areas, the liability is on the driver of the vehicle. You can also be liable for damage to the livestock and the owner can file legal claims against the driver. Interestingly through, statute 11.24.108 requires livestock to not be picketed (tied to something) on a public highway right-of-way from one hour before sundown to one hour after sunrise.

Speaking of public land, nearly half of Wyoming's land is designated public land. With public land comes public access and this can be a cause of controversy. Public land in Wyoming constitutes Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land, US Forest Service (USFS) land, as well as state land, and land administered by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD). Public lands can be used for recreation and hunting. However, often the access of those lands are through private land, and that doesn't grant public access and is in violation to criminal trespass statutes. According to the WGFD website (wfgd.wyo.gov), to legally access public or state lands, you must travel onto those lands by several methods including by public road or highway, floating on water, walking from bordering public land, or state lands that are legally accessible, or entering from bordering private land with permission. Now here's the tricky part; corner crossing. Corner crossing occurs where public lands adjoin by only the corners of public land touching. Generally disputes of corner crossing are due to hunting and public land vs public access. In 2022, a

major lawsuit involving out-of-state hunters and a Wyoming landowner brought the controversy of corner crossing access into the spotlight. To avoid potential conflicts, make sure to use up-to-date maps or GPS units, or get private land-owner permission to cross the property.

Now let's talk about hunting. Hunting in Wyoming is big business. The diversity of landscapes and array of wildlife from big game, small game, trophy animals, and turkeys, provides multiple opportunities to harvest wild game. There are many rules governing hunting in Wyoming that can be found on the WGFD website. A few of the basic hunting guidelines are that hunters born after 1966 must complete a hunter education safety certification course and obtain a valid hunting license. There isn't an age limit to taking the hunter's education course, but it is written at a fourth grade reading level. To hunt big or trophy game, a hunter must be 12 years old and be accompanied by an adult with hunting privileges. For specifics, check out the website. Here is some information for landowners that might be having vermin problems. Coyotes are predators in Wyoming. This means there are no hunting license requirements, however you cannot harvest from a public road. The same goes for jackrabbits, raccoons, red fox, porcupines, and skunks. Prairie dogs are included in this as well. Hunters harvesting regular rabbits, not jackrabbits, must have completed hunter's safety and obtain a small game license.

Moving into Wyoming is an adventure. There can be a steep learning curve in navigating the nuances and expectations in the community you are coming to. Do your part to make it less difficult for yourself and the natives by knowing some of the most common causes of conflict within a rural community and help prevent clashes.