



So You're Considering a Run for County Commissioner

A Candidate's Guide to the Roles and Responsibilities
of County Commissioners in Wyoming, 2026



WCCA STAFF

Jerimiah Rieman

Executive Director

(307) 286-7524

jrieman@wyo-wcca.org

Triston Rice

Natural Resource Policy Analyst

(307) 262-3186

trice@wyo-wcca.org

Micah Christensen

Natural Resource Counsel

(307) 287-3348

mchristensen@wyo-wcca.org

Lindsey Goodman

Office Manager

(307) 632-5409

lgoodman@wyo-wcca.org

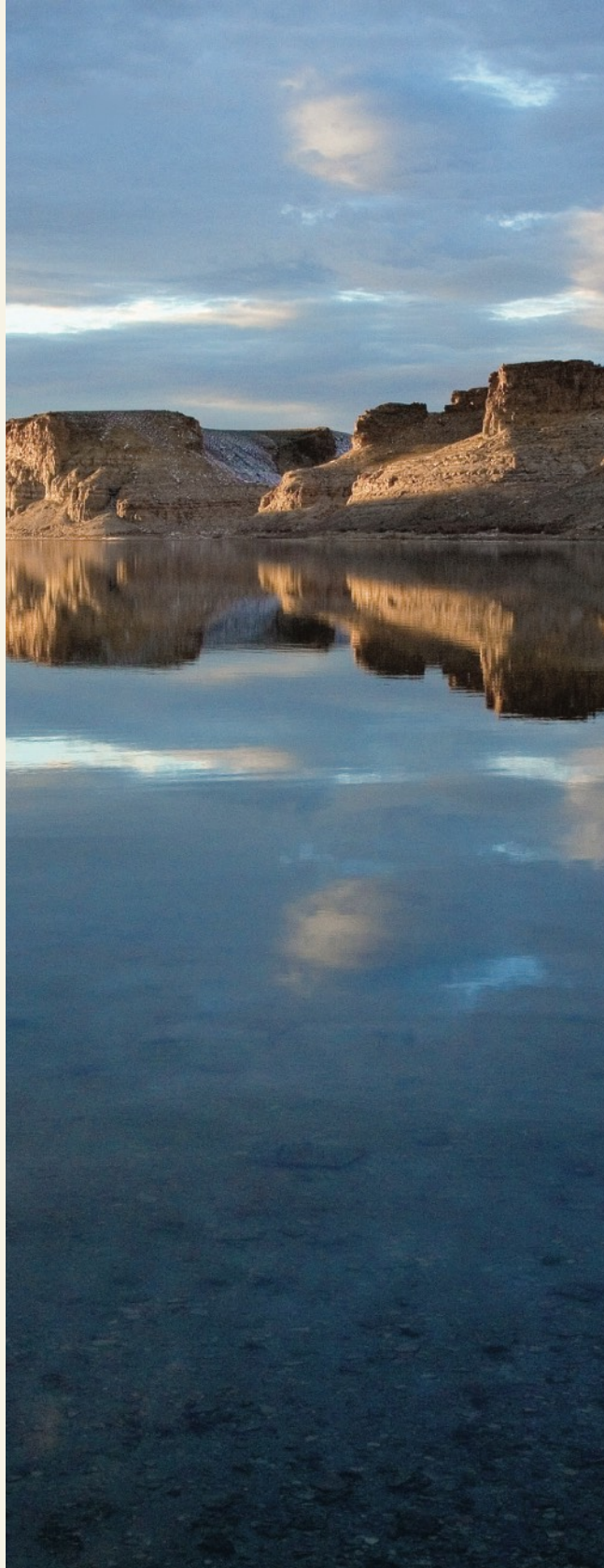


**Wyoming County
Commissioners Association**

408 West 23rd Street
Cheyenne, WY 82001

(307) 632-5409

wyo-wcca.org



Why do you want to be a county commissioner?

For many, the answer is rooted in a desire to serve—an interest in civic leadership, a commitment to improving local communities, or a vision for strengthening Wyoming. Those motivations matter. But it is just as important to consider this question from a practical standpoint.

The day-to-day work of a county commissioner is often more complex and demanding than expected. Commissioners are responsible for navigating a wide range of issues, some routine, others unexpected and highly consequential. Your constituents will rely on you to be prepared for complex challenges, whether that means responding to infrastructure concerns, balancing budgets, or confronting emergencies such as a global pandemic.

If a single issue inspired your decision to run—county roads, fiscal policy, government responsiveness, or another priority—developing subject matter expertise is valuable. However, the role requires much more. Commissioners conduct and participate in public, transparent meetings; collaborate with fellow elected officials; advocate for county interests at the state level, including at the Capitol; and, in some cases, engage in federal land and mineral management discussions. As many have said, serving as a county commissioner is the most full-time, part-time job you will ever have.

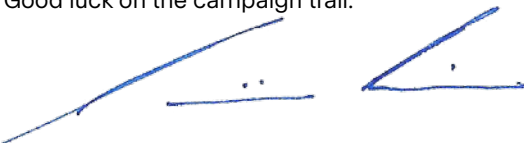
During the election cycle, the Wyoming County Commissioners Association (WCCA) receives inquiries from prospective candidates seeking guidance. Because the WCCA represents sitting commissioners, not candidates, responding directly can present a conflict.

Even so, the WCCA's mission is to “strengthen Wyoming's counties through networking, education, and unified action.” With approximately one-third of Wyoming's county commissioners turning over every two years due to retirement or election outcomes, providing a foundational resource for prospective commissioners is both practical and appropriate.

This guide is intended to serve as a starting point, offering insight into the responsibilities, expectations, and realities of the role. Should you be elected, you will become a member of the WCCA and gain access to the full range of resources and support the Association provides.

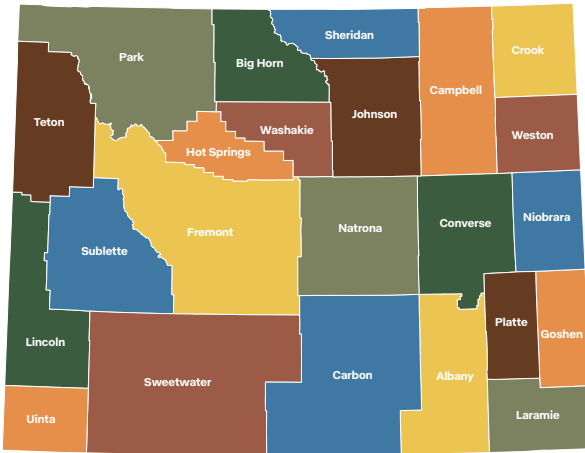
Until then, I hope this guide helps you better understand what it means to serve.

Good luck on the campaign trail.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jerimiah Rieman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the text.

Jerimiah Rieman, Executive Director
Wyoming County Commissioners Association

What is county government?



Counties are political subdivisions of the state, created to deliver a wide range of services to residents at the local level. Wyoming has 23 counties, each with distinct geographic, economic, and social characteristics that shape both the services provided and the community's capacity to support them.

As extensions of the state, counties operate within powers granted by the Wyoming Constitution and state statute. Unlike municipalities, counties generally do not have broad “home rule” authority; instead, their responsibilities are defined in law. Wyoming statute outlines seven general duties of county government (see W.S. § 18-2-101). The final provision – “exercise other powers as provided by law” – serves as a catch-all, enabling counties to carry out a broad and evolving range of responsibilities authorized by the Legislature.

In practice, county government touches on many aspects of daily life. Boards of county commissioners oversee county operations, adopt budgets, and manage county property, including courthouses and other public facilities. Through road and bridge departments, counties are also responsible for constructing and maintaining county roads, which make up approximately two-thirds of all road miles in Wyoming.

In addition to commissioners, seven other elected county officials—assessor, clerk, clerk of district court, coroner, county and prosecuting attorney, sheriff, and treasurer—carry out duties defined in statute. Each office provides essential services required by state law. A more detailed list of relevant statutes is included at the end of this document.

Counties also provide a variety of services that may not be strictly required by state law but are critical to community well-being. These can include planning and zoning, building code enforcement, animal control, fire protection, parks and recreation, landfills, libraries, airports, hospitals, public health services, and senior centers.

Over time, many of these services have expanded in scope and complexity. In some cases, they are delivered not just as administrative functions of the state, but through locally governed entities and special districts authorized by law, reflecting the growing role counties play as responsive, community-centered governments.

How does county government differ from city government?

While there are several structural differences between city and county government, the most significant is the concept of “home rule” authority. Home rule gives local governments broad discretion to manage their own affairs without needing explicit authorization from the state for every action. In Wyoming, the Constitution (Article 13, Section 1, as amended) grants home rule authority to cities and towns, but not to counties.

As a result, city and town governments can adopt ordinances and policies on a wide range of local issues, provided they do not conflict with state law. Counties, on the other hand, are more limited in their authority. County commissioners may only enact regulations that are specifically authorized by the Legislature. In practical terms, this means counties often function as administrative arms of the state, carrying out state-directed responsibilities at the local level, while cities and towns have broader flexibility to shape local policy and governance.

If I’m elected, I’m the boss of the county, right?

Sorry to disappoint you—but if you’ve been led to believe county commissioners “run the county,” you’ll quickly learn that’s not the case.

County government is a system of independently elected officials, each with their own statutory duties and responsibilities. Commissioners do not directly supervise other elected offices. However, they do play a central leadership role and carry significant, and growing, responsibilities. The general powers of county commissioners are outlined in W.S. § 18-3-504. Some of the most critical duties include budgeting, planning and zoning, emergency preparedness, oversight of county buildings, county roads, and serving as federal cooperating agencies.



Budgeting

County clerks serve as the chief budget officers and are responsible for preparing the annual county budget in coordination with departments and special districts. County commissioners review, modify, and ultimately approve the budget, making them deeply involved in county spending decisions. A strong understanding of revenue sources and expenditures is essential.

To support this work, the WCCA publishes a revenue estimating manual that provides guidance on revenue sources and projections. County budgeting processes are governed by the Uniform Municipal Fiscal Procedures Act (W.S. § 16-4-101 through 124).



County Roads

Commissioners are responsible for the care and maintenance of county roads (W.S. § 24-1-104). Counties manage more road miles in Wyoming than federal, state, and municipal governments combined by a significant margin. For many commissioners, road conditions are the most common issue raised by constituents.



County Buildings and Facilities

Commissioners are responsible for managing county property, including courthouses and other public buildings. These facilities often represent substantial and ongoing costs, particularly in counties with significant law enforcement and judicial infrastructure.



Planning and Zoning

In unincorporated areas, commissioners may regulate land use, including the location and use of buildings and structures. Planning and zoning authority is an important tool for promoting “the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the county” (W.S. § 18-5-201 through 208). These decisions can be complex and, at times, highly visible and contentious.



Emergency Preparedness and Response

County commissioners play a key leadership role in emergency management. Under the Wyoming Homeland Security Act (W.S. § 19-13-101) and the Wyoming Emergency Management Act (W.S. § 35-9-151), commissioners are involved in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies and disasters, whether natural, manmade, or related to national security. The increasing complexity of emergency response, along with coordination across local, state, and federal agencies, has elevated the importance of this responsibility.



Federal Cooperating Agency Role

In counties with significant federal land or mineral ownership, commissioners are often called upon to serve as “cooperating agencies” in federal land use planning and environmental review processes. While federal agencies retain decision-making authority, this role provides counties with a formal opportunity to influence how federal lands and resources within their boundaries are managed. Wyoming’s county commissioners are widely recognized as leaders in this space, and meaningful participation requires a substantial investment of time and expertise.

To support this work, the WCCA publishes resources such as the *Wyoming Public Lands Handbook*, which outlines the laws, policies, and processes governing federal land management.

Where does the revenue come from to deal with all of these issues?

County government is funded through a variety of revenue sources, with the most significant being property taxes (ad valorem) and sales and use taxes. Additional sources include state-shared revenues (such as severance and fuel taxes), service charges, interest earnings, grants, and federal funding.

Counties also play a central role in collecting and distributing property taxes. While counties collect most property taxes, those funds are distributed among multiple entities, including the county general fund, municipalities, school districts, and special districts.

Each year, the WCCA publishes the Revenue Estimating Manual, which provides an overview of major federal and state revenue sources and explains how those revenues are distributed. While this guide does not attempt to break down the detailed formulas, which can be complex, developing a working understanding of county revenue is essential for effective decision-making as a commissioner.

The following are the primary sources of county revenue:

1) Property (Ad Valorem) Tax

Counties are constitutionally limited to collecting 12 mills for county operations.

2) State-Shared Revenue

The State of Wyoming distributes a variety of revenues to counties, typically through statutory formulas:

- **Sales and Use Taxes:** Counties receive approximately one-third of the local share of the state's 4% sales and use tax.
- **Severance Taxes:** Shared by formula for general government purposes and, separately, for road construction and maintenance.
- **Fuel Taxes:** Shared by formula and restricted to road and bridge construction and maintenance.
- **Nicotine Taxes:** Shared with local governments for general purposes.
- **Wind Energy Generation Taxes:** Distributed to impacted counties.
- **Discretionary Appropriations:** Determined by the Legislature and often distributed by formula.

3) Local Option Taxes

Counties may propose optional taxes that must be approved by voters, as well as by at least 50% of the municipalities within the county. These may include:

- **General Purpose Taxes**
- **Specific Purpose Taxes**
- **Economic Development Taxes**

4) Federal Revenue Sharing

- *PILT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes)*: Federal payments that help offset the presence of non-taxable federal lands within a county.
- *Secure Rural Schools (SRS)*: Funding to support counties with significant federal forest lands.

5) Grants and Loans

Counties may receive state and federal grants or access loan programs to fund specific projects, infrastructure, or services.

6) Locally Assessed Fees

Counties generate revenue through fees for services such as permits, licenses, and other administrative functions.

A Practical Note

County revenue is often constrained, highly regulated, and subject to economic conditions—particularly in a state like Wyoming where energy markets play a significant role. As a result, commissioners must balance public expectations with fiscal realities, making informed and sometimes difficult decisions about priorities and spending.

Why are county commissioner meetings so formal in my county, and why are they always on set days and in public?

One of the more surprising aspects of serving as a county commissioner is the contrast between Wyoming's informal culture and the formality of the office itself. As an elected official, you are afforded the title "Honorable," which can feel overly formal in a state that values accessibility and humility. However, that formality serves an important purpose. It reinforces the seriousness of the role and helps establish expectations for professionalism, respect, and orderly conduct, especially during difficult or contentious decisions.

Commissioners are regularly called upon to make decisions where not everyone will agree with the outcome. In those moments, how meetings are conducted matters just as much as the decisions themselves. Maintaining structure, consistency, and decorum helps build public trust and ensures that all voices are heard in a fair and respectful environment.

Beyond etiquette, there are also important legal requirements that govern how county commissioners conduct business. Wyoming's open meetings laws require that nearly all county business be conducted in public, with proper notice and opportunity for public observation. This ensures transparency and accountability in local government.

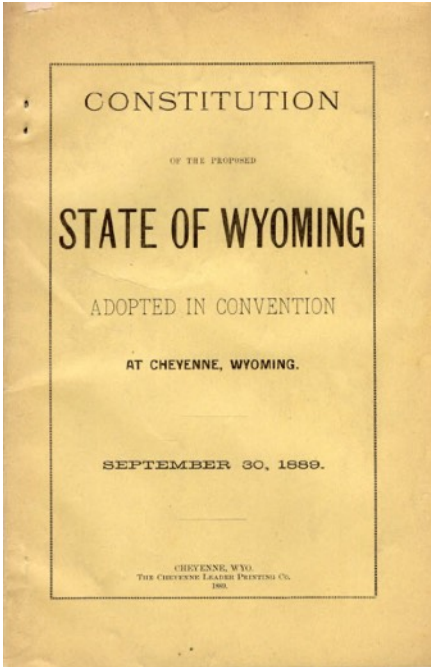
Meetings are typically held on a regular, predictable schedule, often established by statute or by the board's own rules, to provide consistency and allow the public to stay informed and engaged. While many counties hold meetings on set days each month, additional meetings may be scheduled as needed, provided proper notice is given.

Failure to follow open meeting requirements or procedural rules can have serious consequences, including the invalidation of actions taken by the board. In short, the structure and formality of county commissioner meetings are not arbitrary, they are essential to lawful governance, public trust, and effective decision-making.

Where can I go to learn more?

The most important place to learn more about the duties and responsibilities of county commissioners is in Wyoming's Constitution and statutes. Both can be found at <https://wyoleg.gov>.

Wyoming Constitutional Provisions



Wyoming was admitted to the Union in 1890, though the Wyoming Constitution, forming the legal foundation for county government, was drafted in 1889. The Constitution grants the Legislature authority to define the powers and duties of counties.

County government in Wyoming, however, predates statehood. The Office of the County Commissioner was established in 1876 under territorial law, thirteen years before the Constitution was adopted. In many respects, the Constitution affirmed and carried forward structures that were already in place. Today, state statute provides that: "Each organized county in the state is a body corporate and politic. The powers of the county shall be exercised by a board of county

commissioners" (W.S. § 18-2-101). From this legal foundation, counties and their elected officials have been assigned a wide range of responsibilities.

Article 12: The Foundation of County Government

The basic constitutional framework for county government is set forth in **Article 12** of the Wyoming Constitution.

- **Section 1** formally recognizes all counties existing at the time of statehood as counties of the State of Wyoming.
- **Sections 2 through 5** address the organization of local government structures, including townships, and affirm the Legislature's authority to establish and define county offices.
- **Section 5** specifically directs the Legislature to provide for the election of necessary county officers.

In short, Article 12 establishes counties as political subdivisions of the state and leaves most details of their structure and authority to statute.

Other Relevant Constitutional Provisions

In addition to Article 12, several other constitutional provisions directly affect county government:

Article 3, Section 27

Prohibits the Legislature from passing local or special laws except in limited circumstances. Courts have clarified that laws may classify groups, so long as the classification is reasonable and applied uniformly to those in similar situations.

Article 3, Section 30

Prohibits granting extra compensation to county officers after services have been rendered or contracts made.

Article 3, Section 37

Prohibits delegating taxing authority or core municipal functions to entities not accountable to the public, preserving local control and accountability.

Article 14, Section 2

Requires county officials to account for all public funds collected.

Article 15, Sections 3 and 19

Require that mineral production be taxed based on value for both severance (state) and ad valorem (local) taxes.

Article 15, Section 5

Limits county property tax levies to 12 mills for general purposes, exclusive of debt service.

Article 15, Section 8

Makes it a felony for a public official to profit from or misuse public funds.

Article 15, Section 12

Exempts county-owned property from taxation when used for governmental purposes.

Article 16, Section 3

Limits county debt to two percent of assessed value (with certain exceptions). Courts have recognized leasing as a tool that may not count against this limit in some circumstances.

Article 16, Section 4

Restricts counties from incurring debt beyond current-year taxes unless approved by voters, with exceptions for certain special funding arrangements.

Article 16, Section 6

Prohibits counties from lending credit or donating funds to private entities, while allowing the Legislature to define lawful investment practices.

Article 16, Section 7

Requires that public funds be disbursed only through proper appropriation and documentation.

Article 16, Section 8

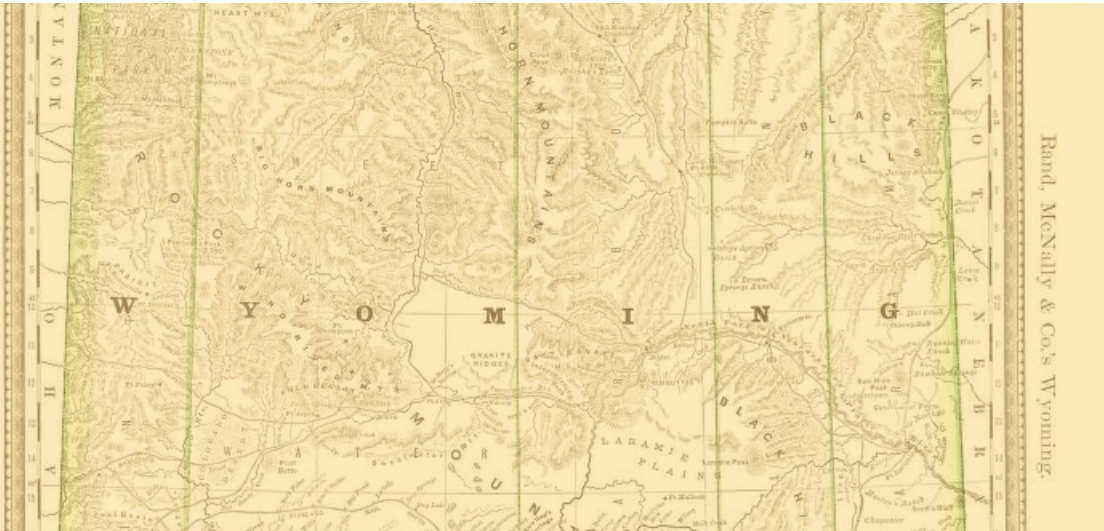
Requires all public debt instruments to certify compliance with legal and constitutional limits.

Article 16, Section 13

Authorizes the Legislature to permit local governments to use public funds for economic or industrial development, subject to voter approval.

A Practical Note

While the Constitution establishes the framework, most of the day-to-day authority and responsibility of county commissioners is defined in statute. Understanding both the constitutional foundation and the statutory details is essential for effective service.



Statutory Reference Guide on County Issues

Category	Topic	Statute
Administrative Procedure Act		W.S. § 16-3-101
Auditing		W.S. § 9-1-507
Bonds	Anticipation Notes	W.S. § 16-5-401
Bonds	Funding	W.S. § 18-4-501
Bonds	General Obligation	W.S. § 18-4-301
Bonds	Viaduct and Subway	W.S. § 18-4-401
Bonds	Revenue	W.S. § 18-8-201
Budget Process	Municipal Fiscal Procedures Act	W.S. § 16-4-101
Building Fund		W.S. § 18-4-201
Cemetery Districts		W.S. § 35-8-301
Certificates of Indebtedness		W.S. § 18-4-104
Conservation Districts		W.S. § 11-16-101
County	Airports	W.S. § 18-9-101
County	Compensation of County Officers	W.S. § 18-3-107
County	Fairgrounds	W.S. § 18-9-101
County	General Powers of the Counties	W.S. § 18-2-101
County	Construction of Jails	W.S. § 18-2-201
County	Jails	W.S. § 18-6-301
County	Libraries	W.S. § 18-7-101
County	Museums	W.S. § 18-10-101
County	Planning and Zoning	W.S. § 18-5-101
County	Planning and Zoning Commission	W.S. § 18-5-201
County	Recreational Systems	W.S. § 18-9-101
County	Prosecuting Attorneys	W.S. § 18-3-301
County Assessor		W.S. § 18-3-201 and W.S. § 39-13-101
County Board of Equalization		W.S. § 39-13-102(c)
County Clerk		W.S. § 18-3-401
County Clerk of District Court		W.S. § 5-3-101
County Commissioners	General Powers	W.S. § 18-3-504

Category	Topic	Statute
County Commissioners	Increasing to Five	W.S. § 18-3-501
County Commissioners	Meetings in General	W.S. § 18-3-506
County Coroner		W.S. § 7-4-101
County Extension Agents		W.S. § 21-17-305
County Sheriff		W.S. § 18-3-601
County Surveyor		W.S. § 18-3-701
County Treasurer		W.S. § 18-3-801
Courts	Circuit Courts	W.S. § 5-9-102
Courts	Judicial Districts	W.S. § 5-3-101
Day Care Centers	Fund Established by Commissioners	W.S. § 18-13-101
Drainage Districts		W.S. § 41-9-101
Emergency Expenditures		W.S. § 16-4-114
Emergency Management		W.S. § 19-13-108
Eminent Domain		W.S. § 1-26-501
Executive Session		W.S. § 16-4-405
Federal Revenue	Abandoned Mine Reclamation	W.S. § 35-11-1201
Federal Revenue	U.S. Forest Reserve Funds	W.S. § 9-4-501
Federal Revenue	Government Royalty	W.S. § 9-4-601
Federal Revenue	Taylor Grazing Act Funds	W.S. § 9-4-401
Financing	Generally	W.S. § 18-4-101
Fire Protection Districts		W.S. § 35-9-201
Governmental Claims Act		W.S. § 1-39-101
Governmental Ethics		W.S. § 9-13-101
Grants and Loans	Abandoned Mine Land	W.S. § 35-11-1202(a)(v)
Grants and Loans	State Loan and Investment Board	W.S. § 9-4-601
Hospital District Finances		W.S. § 35-2-414
Hospital Districts		W.S. § 18-8-301 and W.S. § 35-2-401
Hospitals		W.S. § 18-8-101
Improvement and Service Districts		W.S. § 18-12-101

Category	Topic	Statute
Industrial Development Projects		W.S. § 15-1-701
Industrial Siting Act		W.S. § 35-12-101
Insurance	Local Government Insurance Program	W.S. § 1-42-101
Insurance	State Self-Insurance Program	W.S. § 1-41-101
Investment of County Money		W.S. § 9-4-831(h)
Investment	Equities	W.S. § 9-4-831(a)(xxix)
Investment	WYO-STAR I	W.S. § 9-1-416
Investment	WYO-STAR II	W.S. § 9-4-831
Investment	WYO-STAR III	W.S. § 9-1-419 and W.S. § 9-4-831(a)(xxviii)
Irrigation Districts		W.S. § 41-7-101
Liquor Licenses		W.S. § 12-4-201
Misuse of Office		W.S. § 9-13-105
Nepotism		W.S. § 9-13-104
Official Decisions and Votes		W.S. § 9-13-106
Open Meeting Law		W.S. § 16-4-401
Predatory Animal Districts		W.S. § 11-6-201
Public Health		W.S. § 35-1-305
Public Health Officers		W.S. § 35-1-306
Public Records and Publication of Proceedings		W.S. § 16-4-201 and W.S. § 18-3-516 through 519
Resort Districts		W.S. § 18-16-101
Roads	Private Road Petition	W.S. § 24-9-101
Roads	Private Road Second Hearing, Viewers Report	W.S. § 24-9-103
Roads	Private Roads	W.S. § 24-9-101
Roads and Bridges	Generally	W.S. § 24-3-101
Roads	High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes	W.S. § 31-5-238
Roads	Speed Limits	W.S. § 31-5-303
Rural Health Care District Finances		W.S. § 35-2-708
Rural Health Care Districts		W.S. § 35-2-701
Solid Waste Districts		W.S. § 18-11-101

Category	Topic	Statute
Special Districts	Dissolution	W.S. § 22-29-401
Special Districts	Elections	W.S. § 22-29-101
Special Districts	Reporting	W.S. § 9-1-507(a)(vii)
State-County Road Fund		W.S. § 24-2-110
Subdivisions		W.S. § 18-5-301 and W.S. § 34-12-103
Taxes	Ad Valorem (Property)	W.S. § 39-13-101
Taxes	Ad Valorem (Property) Refund Program	W.S. § 39-13-109
Taxes	Capital Facilities Sales Tax	W.S. § 39-15-204(a)(iii)
Taxes	Cigarette Tax Revenue	W.S. § 39-18-111
Taxes	Diesel Fuel Tax	W.S. § 39-17-211(d)(ii)
Taxes	Gas Tax	W.S. § 39-17-111(d)(i) and (d)(ii)
Taxes	Impact Assistance	W.S. § 39-15-111 and W.S. § 39-16-111
Taxes	Local Government Distributions	W.S. § 39-15-601
Taxes	Lodging Tax	W.S. § 39-15-204(a)(ii)
Taxes	Mineral Severance Tax Revenue	W.S. § 39-14-801(d)(v),(vi), and (vii)
Taxes	One Percent (1%) Optional Sales Tax	W.S. § 39-15-204(a)(i)
Taxes	Sales and Use Tax	W.S. § 39-15-111(b)
Training	Public Officer	W.S. § 9-1-510
Vacancy	County Commissioner	W.S. § 18-3-524
Vacancy	Legislators	W.S. § 22-18-111(a)(iii)
Vacancy	Other County Officers	W.S. § 22-18-111(a)(ii)
Water and Sewer Districts		W.S. § 41-10-101
Wind and Solar Energy	Application Contents	W.S. § 18-5-503
Wind and Solar Energy	Facilities Definitions	W.S. § 18-5-501
Wind and Solar Energy	Minimum Standards	W.S. § 18-5-504
Wind Energy	Tax Rate	W.S. § 39-22-104
Wind Energy	Taxes	W.S. § 39-22-103
Wyoming Joint Powers Act		W.S. § 16-1-101



408 West 23rd Street
Cheyenne, WY 82001
(307) 632-5409
wyo-wcca.org