

*Sheridan County's*  
**CODE OF THE WEST**



## **CODE OF THE WEST**

The famous western writer Zane Grey, first spoke of the Code of the West. He described it as an unwritten code of conduct respected by those living in the wild west. Former Larimer County Commissioner, John Clarke, took this idea and applied it to more modern times and this provides the background for Sheridan County's own code.

By some standards, the wild in the west has been tamed. We're fortunate, however, that at least some of the wild in Sheridan County still exists. In keeping with the same spirit of Wyoming's earlier days, Sheridan County's Code of the West hopes to help preserve the land and Old West values of integrity, self-reliance and accountability. In doing so, you will see we cast some of the west's more romantic ideals into a brisk northerly wind.

We respectfully offer this information to help citizens who wish to follow in the footsteps of Wyoming's forefathers by living in Sheridan County's rural areas.

## **CODE OF THE WEST FOR SHERIDAN COUNTY, WYOMING**

**Introduction:** It is important to know the realities of living in rural Wyoming. It is also important to know that life in the country can be far different from life in the city. You need to be prepared.

As you consider a new place to call home, examine the community and its people. County and small town governments are often unable to provide the same level of service that large "city" governments provide. You should think about transportation, communication, education, health care, employment and public services that are essential to our modern way of life. To that end, we are providing you with the following information to help you make an educated and informed decision before you purchase property or build a home.

- 1.0 **ROADS AND ACCESS:** The fact that you can drive to your property does not necessarily guarantee that your guests or emergency vehicles can. Please consider:
  - 1.1 Emergency response times (sheriff, fire, ambulance, etc.,) cannot be guaranteed. Under some conditions, you may find that emergency response is extremely slow due to circumstances beyond the control of emergency service providers.
  - 1.2 There can be problems with the legal aspects of access, especially if your "access" crosses someone else's property. It is wise to obtain legal advice and understand that easements may be necessary.
  - 1.3 Sheridan County maintains approximately 44 bridges, 24.4 miles of pavement, and 494.8 miles of dirt and gravel roads. There are County roads in our County that are not maintained (meaning no grading or snow removal). These roads are sometimes referred to as "dry weather" roads. Check with the County Engineering Department to determine the status of a specific road.
  - 1.4 Sheridan County experiences extreme weather conditions that can damage or destroy roads and bridges. It is wise to determine whether or not your private access road was properly engineered and constructed. Even with proper engineering, annual road maintenance can be expected. This can require renting or owning special equipment (tractors, snow blades, etc.).
  - 1.5 Many large construction vehicles cannot navigate narrow roads and bridges. If you plan to build, it is prudent to check out construction access. Rural residences can be more costly to build due to delivery fees and cost required to get materials to your site.

- 1.6 School buses travel only on maintained public roads designated as school bus routes by the school district. Children may need to be driven to designated school bus pick-up locations.
- 1.7 In extreme weather even County-maintained roads can become impassable. You may need a four-wheel drive vehicle with chains to travel on some snow-packed roads. Snow removal on some County roads may take up to 72 hours or longer. Under certain conditions, roads become narrower. Yielding the right of way is not merely a legal concept; it is a critical safety issue. Living in a rural area means developing special driving skills and good judgment. Driving off road to avoid bad road sections can make a situation worse, tearing up road banks and accelerating erosion. (Please don't do it.)
- 1.8 Don't expect neighbors to join a petition asking for improved service from the County. This includes, but is not limited to: road paving and maintenance, snow removal, and animal and child advisory signage. Rural counties survive on volunteerism. Costs are kept down by the willingness of the populace to go without many things suburban and urban people regard as necessities. Rural people cherish their independence and willingness to take care of their own.
- 1.9 Natural disasters, especially floods, can destroy roads. In time Sheridan County will repair and maintain County roads. Subdivision and private roads are the landowners' responsibility. Rain and run-off can turn a dry creek bed into a raging torrent, washing out roads, bridges and culverts. Residents served by private roads and/or bridges could be hit with large bills for repairs and/or reconstruction after floods.

- 1.10 Unpaved roads generate dust and often lots of it depending on traffic volume. In dry years dust is a pervasive problem. At the least, dust can be an unpleasant and on-going fact of life for most rural residents. In some cases, health problems can result.
- 1.11 If your road is unpaved, it is highly unlikely that Sheridan County will pave it in the foreseeable future. Check with the County if a seller of property indicates that unpaved roads will be paved!
- 1.12 Unpaved roads can "washboard" when dry and dusty, and become muddy and slippery when wet. Vehicle maintenance costs can go up with regular travel on rural County roads.
- 1.13 Sometimes it may seem we're still in the days of the Pony Express. Don't expect the same urban efficiency with regards to mail, newspaper and other delivery services.
- 1.14 Clearly display your address at your driveway entrance for use by emergency services and delivery vehicles.
- 1.15 It is not unusual for a County snowplow to block your driveway with snow during plowing. Remember, it is illegal to remove snow from your driveway into a County right-of-way. Please find another location to store snow.
- 1.16 Most roads in subdivisions, while dedicated to "the public", are not County Roads. As such, do not expect any county repair or maintenance. Do expect fellow homeowners to approach you for money to help keep up subdivision roads.

- 2.0 **UTILITY SERVICES:** Water, sewer, natural gas, cable television, electric, telephone and other services may be unavailable or not up to par with urban standards. Also, be prepared for delays.
- 2.1 Telephone communication can be a problem, especially in Sheridan County's remote areas. Cellular phones do not work in all areas.
- 2.2 Sewer service is generally available only within municipalities. You will need to use an approved septic system or other treatment process. Soil type, depth to ground water or bedrock, stream and river setbacks, and slope are important elements in determining the cost and function of your system. Contact the Sheridan County Engineering Department for requirements.
- 2.3 Many rural residents rely on wells for their water supply. You should know the differences between well and municipal water supplies. Costs to establish a well can be considerable, and water quality and quantity can be unreliable. Water quality is becoming increasingly problematic in Sheridan County and the west. If you're expecting daily showers, water for the garden, water for agricultural purposes, there may not be enough to do it all.
- 2.4 Electric and natural gas service is not available to every region of Sheridan County. It can be very expensive to extend lines to remote areas. While many rural residents use delivered propane, be aware that it may be more costly than natural gas.
- 2.5 Proper utility easements are essential. Be sure you know where your utilities come from and if needed easements are in place.

- 2.6 Electric power in single phase is standard, but a three-phase service configuration comes at a premium and is not available everywhere. If you have special power requirements, it is important to know what level of service can be provided to your property.
- 2.7 Electric service fees may vary. It is important to know costs before making a decision to purchase a specific piece of property, so please check with the local provider.
- 2.8 Power outages are a fact of rural living. Be prepared. An outage can turn off your well pump, your freezer, your heat source, etc. Make sure you have provisions to survive minus power for up to a week in severe cold.
- 2.9 Trash removal is sometimes unavailable or inconvenient in rural areas. It is illegal to create your own trash dump, even on your own land. It is important to research your options regarding removal and recycling. Animal-proof refuse containers are a good idea in many areas.
- 2.10 If you have access to a supply of treated domestic water, the tap fees can be expensive. You may also find that your monthly cost of service can be costly when compared to municipal systems.
- 3.0 **THE PROPERTY:** Owning rural land means knowing how to care for it. Continual stewardship and land management are essential elements of rural life. There are many issues that can affect your property. It is important to research these items before purchasing land.

- 3.1 Driveway permits are required for access onto County roads. A proposed driveway may conflict with safety and traffic flow. Please check with the Sheridan County Engineering Department regarding such access prior to purchasing your property. Existing easements may require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, sewer lines, etc. across your land. Some easements may not be recorded. Check these issues carefully.
- 3.2 Many property owners do not own the mineral rights below their property. Subsurface owners often have the ability to alter surface characteristics to extract minerals. It is very important to know the type of minerals under your land and who owns them. Be aware that adjacent mineral extraction uses can expand and cause negative impacts.
- 3.3 You may be provided with a plat of your property. Do not assume the plat is accurate unless the land has been surveyed and pins placed by a licensed surveyor.
- 3.4 Fences and outbuildings may straddle property lines. A survey of the land by a licensed surveyor is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines.
- 3.5 Many subdivisions and planned unit developments have covenants or deed restrictions that limit the use of the property. It is important to obtain a copy of the covenants (or confirm that there are none) and make sure that you can live with those rules. Also, a lack of covenants can cause problems between neighbors.
- 3.6 Homeowners' associations frequently take care of common elements, road maintenance, snow removal, weeds, open space, etc. A dysfunctional association or poor covenants can cause problems and possibly involve you in expensive litigation. Homeowners' associations typically collect dues. Association bylaws will tell you how the organization operates and how dues are set.

- 3.7 Open fields and pastures may not remain so indefinitely. The Sheridan County Planning Department can help determine the zoning of a piece of property and if there are plans for future development. The view from your property may change.
- 3.8 All of Sheridan County is zoned. Do not assume you can do whatever you want with your land. Before you buy or build, check with the Sheridan County Planning Department to see which zoning restrictions apply to the property. You may need a Zoning or Building permit prior to construction and certain uses may be restricted.
- 3.9 Your new homesite is a particularly important decision because it is so permanent. Recent arrivals often build their homes on the highest ridge or hilltop. There can be numerous disadvantages to such siting. Weather and exposure can wreck havoc with hilltop homes. Access and obtaining water can also present problems. Plus such siting can spoil everyone else's view.
- 3.10 Understanding the soil and its limitations can be very useful. Soil properties affect a site's susceptibility to erosion and help identify areas classified as wetlands. Soil types can help determine appropriate building and road locations, septic systems, crop or hay production and landscaping. The Sheridan County Conservation District office has information on soils.
- 3.11 Sheridan County landowners are responsible for controlling noxious weeds on their property and can be held legally accountable if they fail to do so. The Sheridan County Weed & Pest District can help you identify noxious weeds and devise the best plan of attack.

- 3.12 If you have a ditch on your property, the ditch owners have the right to access your property to obtain water and maintain the waterway.
- 3.13 Water rights that are sold with the property may not give you the right to use the water from any ditches crossing your land without coordinating with a neighbor who also uses the water. Other users may have senior rights to the water that can limit your use or require you to pay for the oversizing or other ditch improvements.
- 3.14 It is important to make sure that any water rights you acquire with the land will provide enough water to maintain fruit trees, pastures, gardens or livestock.
- 3.15 The water flowing in irrigation ditches belongs to the State of Wyoming. Someone has a right to use this water. Additionally, Wyoming water administration laws do not recognize any riparian rights with regard to natural flow for persons living on the bank of any stream. Contact the State Engineers Office if you do not know. You cannot assume you have a right to this water.
- 3.16 To protect waterways and wetlands, permits are typically required prior to any alterations. For instance, to install a culvert or a bridge, or to stabilize eroding stream banks, a permit may be necessary from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Regulatory Office in Cheyenne.
- 3.17 Flowing water can be a hazard, especially to young children. Before you decide to live near an active ditch, consider the possible danger to your family. Ditch owners are not legally responsible for accidents. Also, flow levels may change abruptly without warning.

- 3.18 Irrigation ditches can raise ground water levels. Be sure to check if there is a seasonal ground water fluctuation that may affect your basement or well. Ditch owners are typically not liable for damages due to seepage to structures built after the ditch was constructed.
- 3.19 Sheridan County is blessed with renowned fisheries, which provide an important component of our economy. Some new residents want to establish their own fishery in the form of a private pond. While private ponds provide recreational and aesthetic benefits, they can also be detrimental to our wild fisheries if they are not carefully built off-stream. Make sure to contact the Wyoming Game and Fish Department for any requirements.
- 4.0 **MOTHER NATURE:** Rural residents usually experience more problems when the elements and earth turn unfriendly. Here are some thoughts to consider:
- 4.1 The physical characteristics of your property can be positive and negative. Trees are a wonderful amenity, but also provide the fuel behind forest fires. Building at the top of a forested draw should be considered as dangerous as building in an area prone to flooding. Grassland fires are not uncommon. Defensible perimeters are very helpful in protecting buildings from forest or grassland fires and inversely can protect the forest or grassland from igniting if your house catches on fire. If you start a forest or grassland wildfire, you may get the bill to put it out. Contact your local fire district for more information.
- 4.2 Steep slopes composed of weak clay soils can slide or slump in wet weather. Large rocks can also roll down slopes, presenting danger to people and property.

- 4.3 North-facing slopes or canyons rarely see direct sunlight in the winter. There is a possibility that snow will accumulate and not melt until spring. Also, it snows in the Rockies year-round. Don't be surprised if the Fourth of July parade gets snowed out.
- 4.4 Land topography can tell you where the water will go during heavy precipitation. Sometimes landowners fill a ravine only to find water running through their home during the next storm.
- 4.5 Residents sometimes protect their homes from flooding with sandbags. The County may not be able to provide sandbags, equipment or people to protect private property from flooding.
- 4.6 A flash flood can occur, especially during the summer months and spring run-off, turning a dry gully into a raging river or a field into a lake. It is wise to consider the potential for flooding when building. Portions of the County have delineated floodplains or flood-prone areas where construction is either prohibited or regulated. You may need a floodplain permit. Contact the Sheridan County Engineering Department.
- 4.7 Nature can provide you with some wonderful native neighbors. However, even seemingly harmless animals like deer eat gardens and get in the way of cars. Learn how to live with your wild neighbors. Call the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, or the Sheridan County Extension Office for further information.
- 4.8 Rural development often encroaches on the traditional habitat of coyotes, mountain lion, bear, rattlesnakes, ground squirrels, mosquitoes and other dangerous and/or nuisance species. Respect their space. Watch your pets and properly store your trash. And watch the wildlife ... from a distance.

- 4.9 There's nothing quite like a beautiful Wyoming summer day, until your picnic is crashed by horse flies and mosquitoes. There's no doubt these pests are a pain. The real pain, however, begins when the spray used to kill the buggers negatively impacts the frogs, the birds, and tender native plants. If your picnic, and/or house is near a bog, wetland, or river; be aware of all the native creatures that come with it and tread lightly. Save some nature for your grandchildren.
- 4.10 Weather is one of the most talked about things in the Rocky Mountains. Seasonal fluctuations are the norm. Sometimes it's not the severity of winter, but the length that can get you down. Although the weather can be unpredictable year-round, recorded averages can give you some idea of what to expect:
- July Daily Average: 85°F    January Daily Average: 33°F
- July Record High: 106°F    January Record High: 70°F
- July Record Low: 35°F    January Record Low: -35°F
- 4.11 Sheridan County is seismically active. We have earthquakes and areas of unstable soil associated with this seismic activity. Check with US Geologic Survey (USGS) and the Sheridan County Building Official for more information.
- 5.0 **AGRICULTURE:** The people who first settled here brought water to the barren, arid east slope of the Rockies through an ingenious system of water diversion. This water has allowed agriculture to become an important part of our environment. There are a few things you need to know:

- 5.1 Farmers and ranchers often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Hay is often swathed or baled at night. Adjoining agricultural activity may disturb your peace and quiet.
- 5.2 Land preparation and other operations can cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather.
- 5.3 Farms and ranches annually burn their ditches and fields to keep them clean of debris, weeds and other obstructions. This burning creates smoke that you may find objectionable.
- 5.4 Chemicals (fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides) are often used in growing crops. You may be sensitive to these substances and many people actually have severe allergic reactions. Many of these chemicals are applied by crop dusters (airplanes) early in the morning.
- 5.5 Animal manure can, and often does, cause "objectionable" odors. What else can we say? No whining!
- 5.6 Agriculture is an important business in Sheridan County. If you choose to live among farms and ranches, do not expect county government to intervene in the normal day-to-day operations of your agri-business neighbors. In fact, Wyoming has "Right to Farm" legislation protecting farmers and ranchers from nuisance laws (W.S.S 11-44-101-103).

- 5.7 Wyoming is a “fence out” state. This means if you do not want cattle, sheep or other livestock on your property, it is your responsibility to fence them out. It is not the responsibility of the rancher to keep his/her livestock off your property. If you see a new fence go up between you and your neighbor, expect a bill for half its cost.
- 5.8 Animals are dangerous. Bulls, stallions, buffalo, etc. can attack human beings. Children need to know that it is not safe to enter pens or pastures where animals are kept.
- 5.9 Much of Sheridan County receives minimal precipitation. As a result, we have a problem with dust. Even with irrigation, grasslands have limited grazing. Your parcel of land can reasonably support only so many animals. In addition, the year-round presence of animals can damage and destroy grasslands, leaving the land barren: a difficult and expensive problem to restore. The Sheridan County Extension Office can help you with these issues.
- 5.10 Moving to the country is not a license to let pets roam. Even gentle Fido can become a deer-chasing nuisance, predator of small game, or lunch for coyotes. State law protects livestock from your dogs. Dogs found attacking or harassing livestock can and will be shot. No questions asked and no excuse acceptable.
- 5.11 Cattle drives are a long-time Wyoming tradition and don't be surprised to see the tradition taken to the streets. Use good sense and slow down if you happen upon one. Be respectful of those living off the land.

**IN CONCLUSION:** Images of the Old West draw people to an area once filled with miners, farmers, ranchers, loggers and other agricultural workers. Often newcomers are much more romantic about the West than the old-timers and have false hopes about bringing urban lifestyles into the great outdoors. They believe they can fax and e-mail from the mountaintop. In the New West, the information superhighway is often a dirt road.

The information presented here is intended as a guideline and an introduction to some of the realities of rural living. You may discover other issues that have not been covered. We encourage you to research and examine all aspects of country living so you will enjoy Sheridan County and not be *unpleasantly* surprised.

Our County elected officials, administration and staff pride themselves on their accessibility. By publishing the Code of the West, Sheridan County is in no way divesting itself of its responsibility to its constituents. We offer these comments in the sincere hope you better understand how things work in the country.

Sheridan County is a wonderful place to live, work and raise a family. We hope this information will help enhance the quality of your life. Respect your neighbors' livelihood and property, and be aware that your actions or inaction may have an adverse impact.

The previous statements may sound discouraging. We believe the benefits far outweigh the inconveniences. Not only is it the way it is, but it is also the way we like it. That's why we live here and hope that if you choose to be our neighbors, you will embrace the whole experience of living in Wyoming.

For more information on any of these issues, please contact the appropriate agency.

## Phone Numbers

### **Sheridan County:**

Airport	674-4222
Assessor	674-2535
Attorney	674-2580
Circuit Court	674-2940
Clerk & Recorder	674-2500
Clerk of District Court	674-2960
County Commissioner's	674-2900
Community Health	672-5169
District Court	674-4478
Elections	674-2515
Extension Office	674-2980
Emergency Management Coordinator	675-2569
I-Tech/GIS Mapping	675-2470
Juvenile Justice	674-2935
Public Works-Engineering/Building Official	674-2920
Public Works-Planning	675-2420
Road and Bridge	674-2930
Sheriff	672-3455
Treasurer	674-2520
Weed & Pest District	672-3740

### **Other:**

U.S. Army Corps of Eng. Regulatory Office	307-772-2920
Chamber of Commerce	672-2485
Call Before You Dig	811
One Call of Wyoming	800-849-2476
Sheridan City Hall	674-6483
Sheridan Memorial Hospital	672-1000
WY Dept. Environmental Quality	673-9337
WY Game and Fish Department	672-7418
WY Highway Patrol	800-442-9090
WY Road and Travel Information	888-996-7623
WY State Engineer Office	674-7012
WY Dept. of Fire Prevention/Electrical Safety	307-777-7991
Town of Clearmont	307-758-4465
Town of Ranchester	307-655-2283
Town of Dayton	307-655-2217

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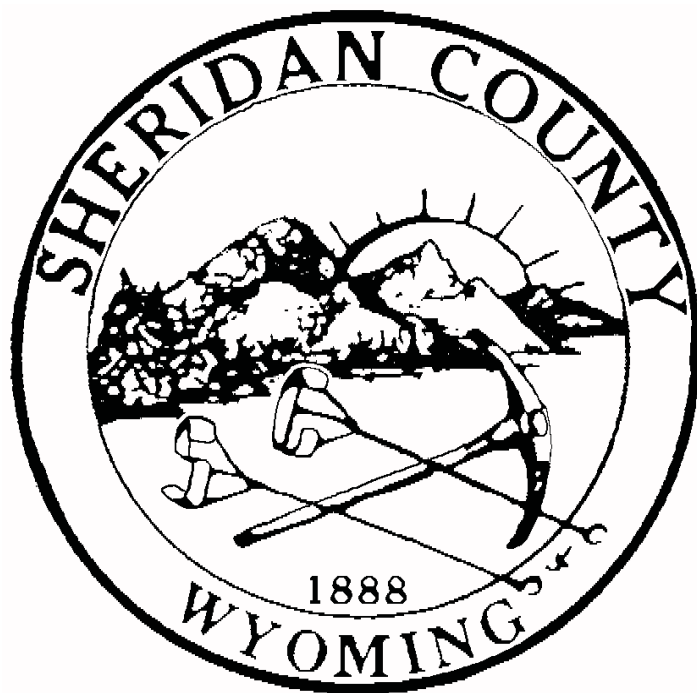
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Natural Resources Geological Survey [www.usgs.gov](http://www.usgs.gov)  
Bureau of Land Management [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov)  
National Park Service [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

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Cover: "Looking For The Wagon" by E.W. Gollings