

Keeping an eye on Mother Nature

Wyoming National Weather Service offices take guesswork out of whether to cut hay or even if a good day to go to the lake

By Dan Berc and Chris Jones

Can't decide whether or not to cut your hay with a 30-percent chance of showers in the forecast?

Maybe you're concerned about your tomatoes getting nipped by an early-season freeze.

Or, you just want to find out if the wind is going to hamper your day at the lake. A group of local experts is available to provide detailed weather information to assist your planning.

The National Weather Service (NWS) provides forecasts and monitors weather events 24 hours a day every day of the year. Five NWS offices serve Wyoming, each with 20 to 25 professionals dedicated to providing the best available weather information.

The primary mission of the NWS is to protect life and property by issuing watches and warnings for hazardous weather. Watches and warnings give advance notice of high-impact weather events. In 2010, the NWS worked to provide forecasts for devastating floods, tornadoes, and a busy fall fire season.

Data Benefits Rural Communities

NWS meteorologists spend much of their time poring over forecast models, examining satellite imagery, and tapping their experience to create routine weather forecasts. Much of the information contained in these day-to-day forecasts can directly benefit the rural community. Short-term detailed forecasts, seven-day forecasts, long-range climate outlooks, drought status information, and historic climate data are a few of the services available.

One of the more popular services for agriculture is the forecast for wind speed and direction before setting fire to a barrow ditch or weed patch.

Weather radios keep you informed; 'all hazards' alert system

An alternative to using the Internet for weather information is a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Weather and All Hazards Radio (NWR) receiver.

These special radios receive weather information on one of seven frequencies and are available at electronics stores or from online retailers. The NWR broadcast provides the latest weather forecasts, current weather observations from around Wyoming and the surrounding region, and important watches and warnings. Most receivers can be set to alarm you when weather warnings are issued for your area.

NWR also serves as an "all hazards" alert system. Public safety officials use NWR to make announcements for emergencies and other incidents that require the public to take protective action. All hazards messages include information on child abduction emergencies – called Amber alerts – and local emergencies, such as public boil water orders or hazardous materials spills.



How do you access all this? If an Internet user, navigate to www.weather.gov, where information about current and forecast weather for the entire country can be accessed. A click on your location on the national map provides a local office website.

You can also navigate directly to these websites at www.weather.gov/riverton or www.weather.gov/cheyenne. These websites provide a map of current watches, warnings, and advisories for your area. Visitors can access a seven-day forecast and current conditions for a specific location, a current radar loop, and satellite images. For information about a radio receiver to obtain weather information (see above), see www.weather.gov/nwr.

The Cheyenne office can be reached at (307) 635-9901 or the Riverton office toll-free at (800) 211-1448.

VOLUNTEER TO REPORT DAILY PRECIPITATION

Now you can be part of improving and expanding the climate record of Wyoming.

The Community Collaborative Rain, Hail, and Snow network, or CoCoRaHS (pronounced co-co-raws), is a national network of volunteer precipitation observers who report precipitation at their locations daily. This precipitation data is used to make decisions, conduct research, and, in the case of the National Weather Service, verify forecasts.

CoCoRaHS data is also used by climate and hydrology professionals in Wyoming and across the U.S. in monitoring and assessing drought conditions. The precipitation database is free and available to anyone. For more information or to join, contact your local NWS office or visit <http://www.cocorahs.org>.

Let the NWS Know About Extreme Events

NWS employees can provide assistance as you make important decisions, whether about planting a garden or traveling across the state. Members of the public providing information about conditions they are experiencing is valuable to NWS forecasters as well. If hail is falling at your house, you just drove white-knuckled through a snowstorm on I-80, or wind just ripped the roof off your shed, pick up the phone and let the NWS know.

Historical climate data records are valuable to many, particularly those in the agricultural community. Knowing the history of temperature and precipitation patterns benefits anyone with outdoor interests. The NWS websites provide station-specific records and have links to other popular climate data resources.

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