

2026 Wyoming Search and Rescue Conference Takeaways

May 2, 2026

Co-convened by the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute and the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation

UW | Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute

WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION

Takeaways for Wyoming Search and Rescue (SAR)

This one-day conference brought together Wyoming's SAR community — county sheriffs, SAR teams, state council members, technology experts, and medical partners — for a mix of strategic discussion, technical training, and hands-on skill-building.

Rulon Gardner, a Wyoming native, is a Greco-Roman wrestling Olympic gold medalist who was rescued by Wyoming Search and Rescue patrollers in 2002. He shared this story among others with the SAR Conference audience, noting the importance of skilled and competent SAR teams. The conference then moved into governance discussions about the possibility of formalizing a statewide structure for search and rescue, then shifted afternoon energy toward practical/technical sessions (avalanche ops, tech tools, helicopter operations), and closed with a team skills competition and social hour.

60+ participants,
speakers, and skills competition volunteers

7 general session speakers
Topics: keynote address & SAR subcommittee conversation

4 breakout sessions
Technological advancements, avalanche operations, helicopter landing session, and skills competition



Takeaway 1

WYOMING SAR IS MOVING TOWARD FORMAL STATEWIDE COORDINATION.

The morning's panel and workshop focused on a potential Wyoming SAR subcommittee, signaling the start of a deeper conversation. This subcommittee would work on improving formalized communications, resource-sharing, and standards across the state.

Takeaway 2

TECHNOLOGY AND RESOURCES REMAIN CENTRAL TO MODERN SAR MISSIONS.

The extended session on BlueFly and CASTViz (co-presented by a tech vendor and a working SAR team member) suggests operational adoption and continued advancement. Statewide, SAR teams are being asked to integrate new tracking/visualization tools into live missions. Additionally, the helicopter session sponsored by Intermountain Health highlights the importance of resource availability, access, and points of contact.

Takeaway 3

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING DRIVES THE PROGRAM.

Sessions are led by practitioners themselves rather than outside consultants, reflecting a community that values field-tested, homegrown expertise over top-down instruction. Additionally, this highlights the close-knit nature of Wyoming SAR.

Several sessions were led by Wyoming SAR members and groups, particularly the skills competition, which was designed and run by Carbon County West SAR.

Connecting the community

Importantly, the conference organizers deliberately balanced a governance-heavy morning with a skills competition and happy hour in the evening. This was an intentional decision aimed to help build camaraderie alongside skill development, both of which are important for a volunteer-heavy, high-stress field like SAR. Additionally, since the event is held right after the Outdoor Recreation Summit, the SAR Conference helps build a collaborative force for a responsible and sustainable outdoor recreation industry in Wyoming.

Post-Event Survey Feedback

One week after the event's conclusion, all attendees were sent a link to an anonymous Qualtrics survey for feedback. While less than a quarter of attendees provided their thoughts, there is room for improvement in several areas of this event, including marketing and information-sharing, content development and delivery, and overall goal and audience alignment.

1. **Marketing and information-sharing:** Survey respondents would like to receive more messaging and event details ahead of time. Tapping into the Wyoming SAR communication network has been a challenge each year that this event has convened.

2. **Content development and delivery:** This year's event experienced a dip in attendance, which supported fewer breakout sessions. We hope to see growth in future years with strategic partnerships, increased communications and marketing efforts, and targeted audience delivery.

3. **Overall goal and audience alignment:** Over the past three years of convening this event, audience alignment has been challenging. Thanks to attendee feedback, we look forward to ensuring next year's event is engaging and valuable to the search and rescue teams across Wyoming.

With Gratitude

Thank you to our sponsors: Discover Carbon County, Intermountain Health, and Adventure Ready Consulting. We appreciate your support!

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Bella's BISTRO

We would also like to thank Bella's Bistro for catering the event.
Check them out here: www.bellaswyoming.com

Special Thanks

We would like to extend heartfelt gratitude to the Carbon County West Search and Rescue team for their instrumental help in the design, planning, and execution of the skills competition. Additional thanks to each member of the planning team: Mike Cavalier, Brynn Hirschman, Dan Hutchison, Elise Lowe, Mike Lujan, Rich Kaumo, and Taylor Kruger.

Next Steps

The 2027 Search and Rescue Conference is TBD. Conversations about this idea are ongoing and in progress, but more information will be shared as it becomes available. Click here (or scan the QR code below) to be added to the mailing list for updates on this event.

Wyoming SAR Conference Updates

