

SUMMARY of PROCEEDINGS



JOINT APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING INFORMATION

August 19-20, 2025
National Museum of Military Vehicles
4619 US 26
Dubois, Wyoming

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Tim Salazar, Co-chairman
Representative John Bear, Co-chairman
Senator Ogden Driskill
Senator Tim French
Senator Mike Gierau
Senator Dan Laursen
Representative Bill Allemand
Representative Abby Angelos
Representative Jeremy Haroldson
Representative Ken Pendergraft
Representative Trey Sherwood
Representative Scott Smith

COMMITTEE MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

None

LEGISLATIVE SERVICE OFFICE STAFF

Tamara Rivale, Legislative Counsel
Don Richards, Budget and Fiscal Administrator
Karen Vaughn, Legislative Editor/Assoc. Fiscal Analyst
Elizabeth Martineau, Senior Fiscal Analyst

OTHERS PRESENT AT MEETING

Please refer to [Appendix 1-02](#) to review the Committee Sign-in Sheet for a list of other individuals who attended the meeting.

The Committee Meeting Summary of Proceedings (meeting minutes) is prepared by the Legislative Service Office (LSO) and is the official record of the proceedings of a legislative committee meeting. This document does not represent a transcript of the meeting; it is a digest of the meeting and provides a record of official actions taken by the Committee. All meeting materials and handouts provided to the Committee by the Legislative Service Office, public officials, lobbyists, and the public are on file at the Legislative Service Office and are part of the official record of the meeting. An index of these materials is provided at the end of this document and these materials are on file at the Legislative Service Office. For more information or to review meeting materials, please contact the Legislative Service Office at (307) 777-7881 or by e-mail at lso@wyoleg.gov. The Summary of Proceedings for each legislative committee meeting can be found on the Wyoming Legislature's website at www.wyoleg.gov.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Joint Appropriations Committee (JAC or Committee) toured a Riverton community health provider on August 19, 2025, before gathering for its meeting in Dubois that afternoon to receive testimony regarding wildfire mitigation, inmate hand crews, firefighter benefits, and an update on the 2025 wildfire season. The following day, August 20, 2025, the Committee received testimony regarding sales and use tax direct distribution and the developmental disabilities waiver program.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chairman Salazar called the meeting to order at 12:31 p.m. The following sections summarize the Committee proceedings by topic. Please refer to [Appendix 1-01](#) to review the Committee Meeting Agenda. Meeting recordings are available on the Legislative YouTube page at: [August 19](#), [August 20-AM](#), and [August 20-AM2](#).

Opening Remarks

The meeting opened with remarks from Co-chairman Salazar and Co-chairman Bear, who expressed appreciation for the venue and acknowledged Mr. Dan Starks for hosting the committee at the museum facility. The Committee also welcomed Senator Tim French, newly appointed to fill the vacancy left by Senator Darin Smith's resignation.

WYOMING WILDFIRE MITIGATION, MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSE FUNDING

2025 Fire Season

State Forester Kelly Norris provided a comprehensive update on the 2025 wildfire season. Forester Norris advised that Wyoming is at high risk for fires. Currently, 20 counties have fire restrictions, all Bureau of Land Management (BLM) areas have restrictions, and all National Parks have some level of restriction. To date, Wyoming has experienced 755 wildfires, burning approximately 150,000 acres. Despite the increased number of fires, the state has been more successful in containing them early, aided by enhanced aviation resources and strategic retardant drops. Forester Norris highlighted the pilot program in Casper for fire detection.

Forester Norris reported that 13 fires have qualified for Emergency Fire Suppression Account (EFSA) funding, with costs exceeding \$15 million. The Red Canyon Fire was the first to receive a Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) from FEMA, allowing for up to 75 percent reimbursement of suppression costs. Aviation assets, including helicopters and single-engine air tankers (SEATs), have played a critical role in initial attack efforts. The Wyoming Helitack program has logged over 150 flight hours, and SEATs have dropped more than 146,000 gallons of retardant across 42 fires in 11 counties. State Forestry has also contracted with resources from New Mexico for support. Jared Delay, Assistant State Forester, described the role of the duty officer to prioritize resources.

Sublette County Fire Warden Shad Cooper described a fire that occurred within a subdivision, leading to evacuations and requiring support from helicopters, SEATs, and a large air tanker (LAT). The fire was eventually contained at 209 acres. He noted that although Sublette County has 75 volunteer firefighters, they had to hire a U.S. Forest Service engine crew for mop-up operations because none of their volunteers were available the day after the fire due to work commitments. He highlighted the financial uncertainties involved in ordering resources without confidence in EFSA reimbursement, the significant gap in

workforce capacity, regionalized resources, the need for better coordination, education, and training for landowners, and evacuation liability and procedures.

Campbell County Fire Warden J.R. Fox credited a wet spring and rain for keeping fires low, with 90 initial fire attacks resulting in fewer than 2,000 acres burned. That said, he highlighted July 3 as particularly challenging when 16 fires occurred within an hour, and two homes were struck by lightning. This season, Campbell County has relied on a crew from South Dakota, the Smoke Busters, as well as other regional support and aircraft.

Forester Norris, Assistant Forester Delay, Warden Cooper, and Warden Fox responded to Committee questions regarding resource availability of personnel and equipment, fire fuels, evacuations and entrapments, reliance on volunteers, retention, and regional capacity. Co-chairman Bear questioned whether property owners receive discounted insurance rates for wildfire support efforts, such as becoming fire certified, reducing property hazards, or loaning equipment, and, upon learning no one was aware of such programs, requested that private and federal representatives be added to the October meeting agenda to discuss the matter.

Wildfire Inmate Hand Crews

Director Dan Shannon, Department of Corrections, discussed the Smoke Busters inmate fire crew program, which has operated in partnership with State Forestry for over four decades. See [Appendix 3-02](#). Prior to 2017, the program operated out of Newcastle and Riverton but is now based solely in Newcastle and staffed with 20 inmates. Director Shannon confirmed that while inmate availability is sufficient, expansion in Newcastle is constrained due to competing programs. He advised that if the program were to expand back to Riverton, the cost to the Department of Corrections would be approximately \$19,000 per biennium.

Forester Norris outlined the challenges of establishing a second crew at the Riverton Honor Farm, citing logistical limitations, staffing shortages, and the need for specialized training. She estimated a four-year timeline and a \$2.25 million cost (\$1.5 million one-time and \$750,000 on-going) to establish a second crew, including vehicles, equipment, training and personnel. See [Appendix 3-01](#). The Committee discussed the potential benefits of establishing a civilian seasonal workforce to complement inmate crews and provide continuity for trained individuals after release.

Wildfire Mitigation

Executive Director Bob Budd, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust, presented the distribution of the appropriation from 2025 General Session and discussed cheatgrass management. See [Appendix 3-08](#). He highlighted the ecological and economic threats posed by cheatgrass, which increases fire frequency and degrades rangelands. Director Budd reported that the \$49.5 million allocated for invasive species treatment will be fully committed by the end of the biennium.

Volunteer Firefighter Benefits

David Swindell, Executive Director of the Wyoming Retirement System (WRS), and Lanny Applegate, Vice Chair of the Volunteer Firefighter Pension Board, provided an overview of the Volunteer Firefighter pension plan. Director Swindell provided an actuarial analysis of the account, discussed contribution rates, and outlined the requirements for being a beneficiary. Based on a recent survey conducted by WRS, approximately 80 percent of volunteers are enrolled, and 85 percent of fire agencies subsidize the member contribution. Mr. Applegate explained that the plan's value in recruiting has eroded. See [Appendix 3-05](#).

Director Swindell and Mr. Applegate responded to Committee questions regarding plan funding, fixed benefit amounts, defined contributions versus defined benefits, and the plan's role within a comprehensive compensation package.

While discussing broad retirement policy, Co-chairman Salazar requested an analysis from the Wyoming Retirement System for the estimated cost of a 0.5 percent State employer match after an employee's 3 percent contribution to the 457 deferred compensation program.

Public Comment

Fire Warden's Fox and Cooper summarized their June testimony regarding modular fire teams and stable wildfire response funding. See Appendices 3-03, 3-04, and 3-11. As described, modular fire teams are 10-person, self-sufficient crews trained for both initial and extended wildfire attacks. Each team consists of eight seasonal firefighters and two permanent squad leaders, capable of splitting into smaller units, operating in remote areas, and remaining deployed for up to 14 days. The estimated cost for each team is \$1 million per biennium for personnel and \$500,000 for one-time startup expenses, including equipment and vehicles. In addition to fire suppression, the modular teams could be used during the off-season for mitigation work, such as fuel reduction. This dual-purpose role would enhance their value and provide year-round employment. The proposal includes a request for four such teams to be deployed across the state. Additionally, the Fire Wardens presented a plan to modify the EFSA to ensure funds are available for wildfire suppression, including the following features: (a) a \$60 million cap on the EFSA; (b) a \$40 million minimum for the EFSA; and (c) the creation of a new fire mitigation account with \$10 million allocated for cost-sharing expenses.

The following individuals also provided public comment:

- Glenn Januska, Casper Natrona County International Airport; See [Appendix 3-10](#).
- Mike Moyer, Jackson Hole Fire and EMS;
- Jeremy Barnum, Jackson Hole airport;
- Monica Leininger, Director of External Affairs, and Anika Mahoney, Sagebrush Program Director, The Nature Conservancy. See [Appendix 3-09](#).

[Appendices 3-06](#) and [3-07](#) were received without any additional discussion.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, Co-chairman Salazar adjourned the meeting at 4:20 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20, 2025

CALL TO ORDER

Co-chairman Bear called the meeting to order at 8:30 am.

SALES AND USE TAX / LOCAL GOVERNMENT DIRECT DISTRIBUTION

Local Government Proposal and Timing

Don Richards, Budget/Fiscal Administrator, LSO, summarized his June testimony. He clarified that the local government direct distribution model was not originally designed to replace the sales tax on food for domestic consumption, which was repealed approximately two years after local government direct distribution began. He estimated that the state currently foregoes approximately \$68 million annually due

to the sales tax exemption on food, based on comparative data from South Dakota. He stressed that the purpose of direct distribution was, at least in part, to provide additional funds to local governments, especially considering caps on mineral revenue distributions. See [Appendix 10-01](#).

Mr. Richards explained that the direct distribution model currently provides approximately \$73 million annually to local governments. Tying direct distribution to sales and use tax anchors local government funding more directly to economic fluctuations, allowing them to benefit from growth but also requiring them to absorb downturns. Mr. Richards noted that the Madden formula, which governs direct distribution allocations, is complex but widely accepted and would remain in use under the new model proposed by the local government associations. To facilitate the transition, the administrative working group recommended transferring the proposed 8 percent of sales and use tax collections annually from the Department of Revenue (DOR) to the Office of State Lands and Investments (OSLI). This approach avoids costly IT programming changes and leverages existing distribution mechanisms. Payments would shift from the current August and January schedule to October and March, using prior fiscal year data to determine allocation amounts.

DOR Director Bret Fanning stressed that the Department's role in direct distribution is limited to collecting the statewide 4% sales tax and transferring 69% of it to the state's general fund. The Department is not involved in making direct distribution payments. OS LI calculates and distributes the funds. He noted that the proposal from the administrative working group maintains the current collection process, avoiding any changes to DOR IT systems.

OSLI Director Stacia Berry testified that OS LI is prepared to continue administering the distribution of funds to local governments. She emphasized that OS LI has participated in the administrative working group and is equipped to handle the proposed changes, provided the frequency of payments remains twice a year.

Jerimiah Rieman, Executive Director, Wyoming County Commissioners Association, and Ashley Harpstreith, Executive Director, Wyoming Association of Municipalities, expressed strong support for the proposed changes, citing the need for stability and predictability in local government budgeting. They emphasized that the reform would not raise taxes or increase state spending but rather formalize existing practices and reduce uncertainty. The associations advocated for maintaining the current formula to ensure equitable distribution, particularly for revenue-challenged communities.

Committee Discussion

Committee members expressed a shared commitment to developing a well-considered legislative solution. They acknowledged the complexity of the issue and the need to strike a balance between fiscal responsibility and support for local governments. Several members emphasized the importance of taking the time to get the legislation right, given its potential to shape state policy for decades. The Committee plans to continue discussions in upcoming meetings and finalize a proposal by December or January.

Public Comment

The following individuals provided public comment:

- Mayor Patricia Neveaux, Dubois
- Kyle Butterfield, Riverton City Administrator
- Sandy Hust, Dubois Town Clerk and Treasurer
- Pat Sweeney, Casper City Council

DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED WAIVER PROGRAM

Wyoming Department of Health

Director Stefan Johansson, Wyoming Department of Health, accompanied by Home & Community-Based Services Administrator Elizabeth Forslund, provided an overview of the Developmentally Disabled Waiver Program. Director Johansson outlined three key areas for legislative consideration: funding the waiting list, adjusting provider reimbursement rates, and addressing emergency needs through the Extraordinary Care Committee (ECC). See [Appendix 17-00](#).

As of the meeting date, 389 individuals were on the waiting list, with projections estimating that the number could rise to 415–450 by the end of the biennium. To eliminate the waiting list, Director Johansson estimated a biennial cost of approximately \$24.9 million, with half funded by the state's general fund and the other half matched by federal Medicaid funds. He emphasized that while funding the waiting list is critical, it must be paired with adequate provider rates to ensure service capacity. He noted that many providers are operating below capacity due to staffing shortages and that increasing rates could help attract and retain qualified personnel.

Ms. Forslund elaborated on the structure of provider rates, explaining that they encompass both direct care costs (such as wages, benefits, and training) and indirect costs (including administrative expenses and facility maintenance). She also clarified that all individuals are initially funded through the supports waiver, which provides a standardized budget of approximately \$30,000 per year. Higher levels of service are determined through assessments conducted when a slot becomes available.

Director Johansson and Ms. Forslund responded to Committee questions regarding rate rebasing, waitlist and assessments, timing and costs, the comprehensive waiver and the supports waiver, residency requirements, and compliance. Specifically, the biennial cost of increasing the provider rates to those identified in the most recent study is estimated at \$48 million, split equally between the state General Fund and federal funds.

Committee Discussion

Committee members discussed the implications of funding the waiting list and adjusting provider rates. They acknowledged the complexity of the issue and the need for careful planning to avoid unintended consequences, such as increased demand from out-of-state residents. The Committee plans to continue discussions in upcoming meetings. The Committee requested the Department of Health estimate the cost of determining the level of service assessment for individuals on the waiting list, rather than after funds become available to enroll the person for supportive services.

Public Comment

The following individuals provided public comment:

- Bob Sell, CEO, ARK Regional Services and Wyoming Community Provider Association (WCPA) President
- Tina Conley, Executive Director, I-REACH 2, Inc.
- Jeff Gardner, President & CEO, Magic City Enterprises Inc. and WCPA Executive Director
- Pat Sweeney, retired legislator
- Jolene Cummings, individual
- Representative Pepper Ottman, House District 34

COMMITTEE DIRECTIVES

Representative Pendergraft moved to create a 3-member subcommittee to conduct a deeper analysis of the Department of Health's budget for the 2027–2028 biennium. If approved by Management Council, the subcommittee will hold two in-person and three virtual meetings. The motion passed by voice vote.

MEETING ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Co-chairman Bear adjourned the meeting at 1:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Co-chairman Tim Salazar

Committee Meeting Materials Index

Index Number	Agenda Item	Document Description	Document Provider
1-01		Agenda	Legislative Service Office
1-02		Sign-In Sheet	LSO
2-01	Call to Order	June 23 Minutes	LSO
3-01	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	WSFD Forestry Conservation Program	WSFD
3-02	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	DOC Letter	DOC
3-03	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	Counties - Wildland Fire Suppression Module	WRF, WFCA,& WSFA
3-04	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	Counties - Wild Fire Requests	WRF, WFCA & WSFA
3-05	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	Volunteer Pension Plan August 2025	WRS
3-06	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	Follow Up: Wildfires	LSO
3-07	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	LSO follow up wildfire cost estimate	LSO

3-08	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	WWNRT Fire Mitigation Funding	WWNRT
3-09	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	Public Comment - Choke Out Cheatgrass	The Nature Conservancy
3-10	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	Public Comment - Aviation Statistics	Jackson Hole Airport
3-11	Wyoming Wildfire Mitigation, Management and Response Funding	Public Comment - W.S. 36-1-402	Wyoming Fire Chiefs Association
10-01	Sales and Use Tax / Local Government Direct Distribution	Follow Up: Food Tax Exemption Estimate	LSO
17-00		Follow Up: WDH Responses	WDH