

RECOMMENDATION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT FISHING OUTFITTERS AND GUIDES BOARD

TO: The Wyoming State Legislature and the Joint Travel, Recreation, Wildlife, and Cultural Resources Committee

FROM: The Fishing Outfitters and Guides Advisory Board

DATE: August 13, 2026

SUBJECT: Recommendation for Standalone Professional Licensing and Oversight of Commercially Guided Fishing

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Wyoming's fisheries represent a premier natural and economic resource. In recent years, recreational and commercially guided recreational fishing pressure has increased significantly, particularly on river systems. While federal agencies maintain patchwork oversight, the State of Wyoming currently lacks a comprehensive, statewide regulatory framework for commercially guided fishing activities. Based on data collected following the implementation of Chapter 71 of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department regulations, it is the official recommendation of this Advisory Board that a standalone **Fishing Outfitters and Guides Board** be established to ensure professional standards, resource sustainability, and industry accountability.

II. DEFINITIONS

To ensure regulatory clarity and prevent the convolution of industry roles, the following definitions are proposed for adoption into statutory language:

- 1. Fishing Guide:** An individual who provides angling assistance, instruction, or transport to any person in exchange for financial compensation or other consideration. A Fishing Guide is not required to hold a commercial use permit but if they do not, must be employed or contracted by and operate under a permit holder.
- 2. Fishing Outfitter:** A business entity or individual that engages in the business of providing, arranging, or contracting fishing guide services for the public. An Outfitter acts as the overseeing administrative body for one or more guides, and can themselves be a Fishing Guide. Any business entity or individual who is issued a commercial use permit by the Fishing Outfitters and Guides board is by default considered an outfitter.

II. RATIONALE FOR AN INDEPENDENT, STANDALONE BOARD

It is the recommendation of this body that commercially operated fishing oversight remain distinct and independent from the existing Wyoming State Board of Outfitters (which currently oversees big game hunting). The reasons for this independence include:

1. **Financial Self-Sustainability:** Initial registration data obtained through Chapter 71 of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department regulations indicates a high volume of commercially operated vessels and trailers. Through licensure fees and the regularization of "bad actors"—individuals currently guiding without proper vessel tags or permits—the Board is projected to be fully self-sustaining without reliance on the state's general fund.
2. **Prevention of Regulatory Convolution:** The equipment, seasonal requirements, ecological impacts, training and safety protocols of fishing guides differ fundamentally from those of big game hunting outfitters. Merging oversight would lead to administrative inefficiency and a dilution of industry-specific standards.

III. PROPOSED STATUTORY AUTHORITY AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

The Fishing Outfitters and Guides Board should be established under Title 33 of Wyoming state statute, and granted statutory authority within the borders of the State of Wyoming to oversee the following areas:

A. Licensure and Enforcement

1. The authority to promulgate regulations pertinent to the commercially operated guided fishing industry in the state of Wyoming.
2. The authority to establish, maintain, and enforce a system of commercial use permitting for commercial fishing outfitter and guide operators for all lands and waters within the state of Wyoming.
3. The authority to approve, deny, or revoke certifications, licenses, and commercial use permits for all commercial fishing outfitting or guide operators, licensees, lands and waters within the state of Wyoming.
4. The authority to revoke or deny issuance of board issued permits regardless of the jurisdictional control or ownership of any lands and waters within the state of Wyoming.
5. The Authority to establish and collect professional licensing and permitting fees to fund board operations.
6. The authority to establish Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with federal, state, and local agencies (NPS, BLM, USFS, etc.) to streamline multi-jurisdictional permitting and regulatory enforcement.

B. Professional and Safety Standards

The Board shall mandate minimum requirements for all licensees, including but not limited to:

1. **Liability Coverage:** Mandatory proof of professional liability insurance.
2. **Safety Certification:** Current certification in CPR and First Aid.

3. **Regulatory Competency:** Demonstrated understanding of Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) boating and fishing regulations.

C. Environmental and Best Practice Stewardship

Licensees shall be held to standards that protect the state's fragile aquatic resources, including:

1. **Fish Handling and Harvest:** Mandatory training on "Keep Them Wet" principles, proper release techniques, and species-specific handling.
2. **Resource Monitoring:** Adherence to water temperature monitoring protocols to prevent fish mortality during thermal stress events.
3. **Angler Satisfaction and Ethics:** Promotion of ethical river etiquette to minimize conflict between commercial and private users.

IV. CONCLUSION

Wyoming's fisheries can no longer be managed under the "wild west" paradigm of unregulated commercial exploitation. To protect the ecological integrity of our aquatic resources and the economic viability of the recreational fishing industry, a formalized, independent Fishing Outfitters and Guides Board is required. This recommendation seeks to balance economic opportunity with the high-quality experience that defines Wyoming's sporting heritage.