

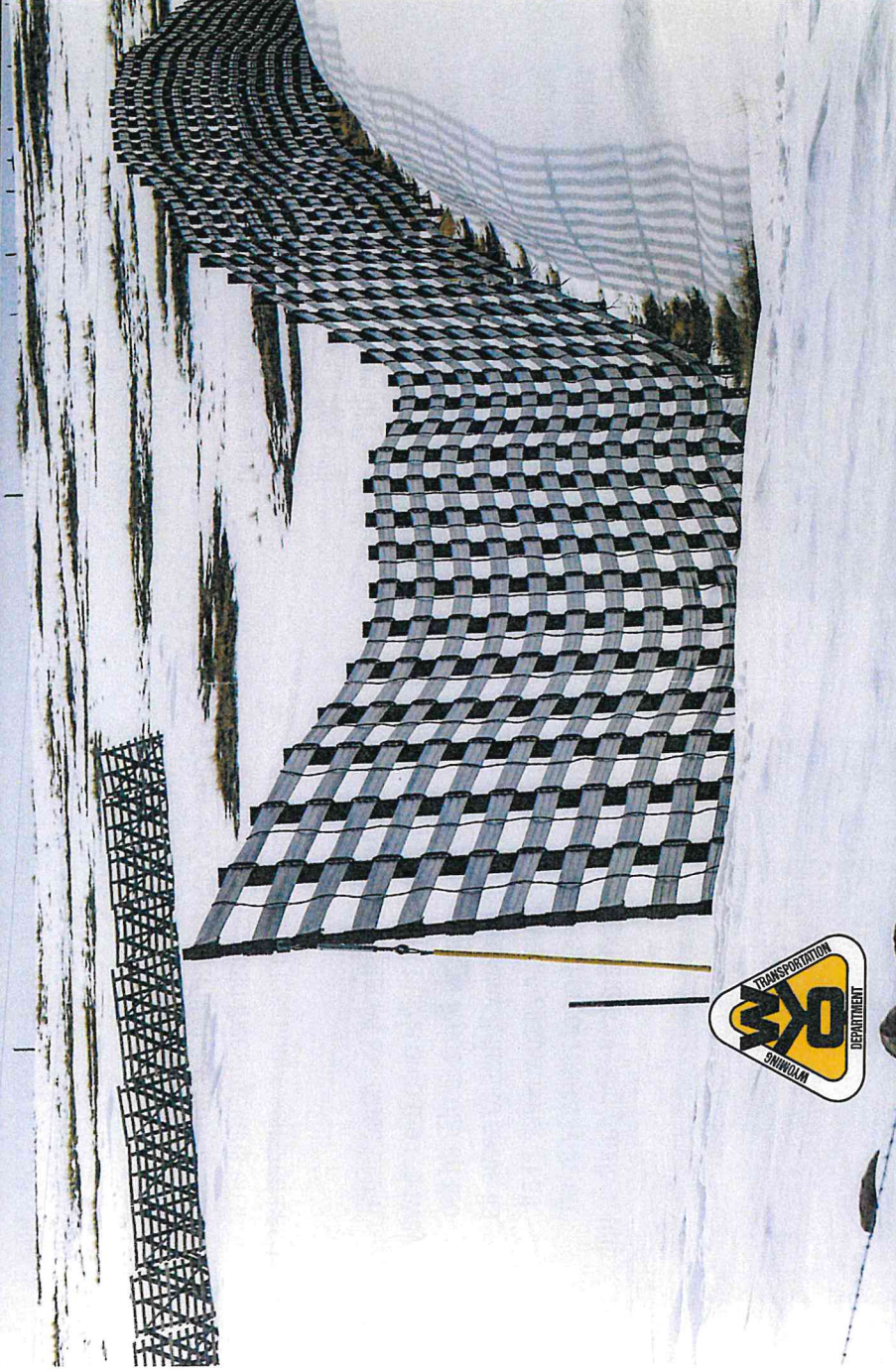
Brief History of Wyoming Snow Fence



Structural snow fence is one of our most effective tools in fighting blowing snow.

Soon after Interstate 80 opened in October 1970, it closed. Massive drifts due to blowing snow made the road impassible and required the use of rotary plows and other heavy equipment to keep it open that winter. That prompted research into blowing snow and snow fence and in 1971, the first stretch of snow fence was installed on I-80. Since then, the frequent closures for snow removal maintenance have all but disappeared. Snow fence has been installed statewide, with the highest concentration remaining along I-80.

Importance of Snow Fence



Wyoming Department of Transportation

Winter Research Services
5300 Bishop Boulevard
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009
dot-snowfence@wyo.gov



Placement of snow fence

Obstacles in placing snow fence

It's no secret...

Wyoming has an abundance of wind. It sweeps across open prairies and rustles the aspen leaves in the mountains. However, it also leads to a dangerous driving situation – blowing and drifting snow on Wyoming roadways.

Blowing snow is caused when wind picks up snow deposited during a storm and relocates it. These particles will stay suspended in the air until the wind encounters something to slow it down. The “something” WYDOT uses is snow fence.

WYDOT uses more than 450 miles of living and structural fences in efforts to keep roads open and the traveling public safe. This is done in cooperation with public and private land stewards who agree to place snow fence on their land.

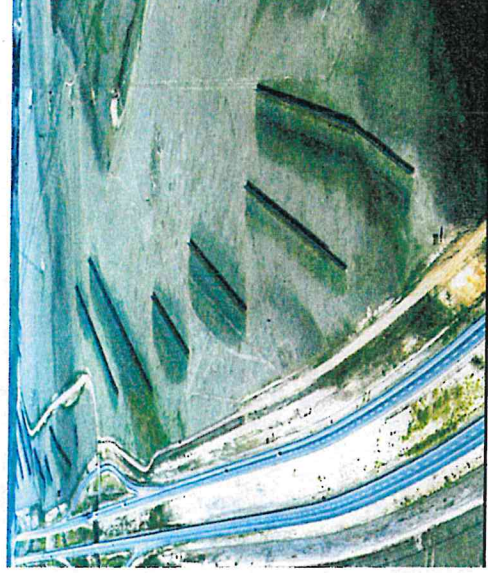


Structural fences help living fences grow and provide roadway protection until the living trees are established.

The Winter Research Services group (WRS) investigates the best location for new snow fence and the best way to improve existing snow fence.

The physics behind the design means the process can take anywhere from a month to a few years. Field investigations ensure that the optimum location is selected each time.

If snow fence is placed too close to the roadway the drift builds onto the roadway surface. If the snow fence is placed too far from the roadway it fails to serve its purpose. Not placing snow fence at all means that a section of roadway is left unprotected and the traveling public is put at risk.



In the our high desert terrain, the water the snow drifts promotes spring growth and feed livestock and wildlife.

Much of the existing snow fence WYDOT maintains was built in the 1970s and many agreements were done with a handshake. As the years have passed, WYDOT is finding that landowners have changed their minds, or the original landowners are no longer there. It has become increasingly difficult to place or keep existing snow fence as subdivisions are established.

As more people move into Wyoming, there are more demands on WYDOT to maintain the roadways for greater numbers of travelers and to improve the safety of winter roadways, all while keeping costs down and doing more with less.

Improving snow fence systems can improve public safety. Snow fence is a low-cost mitigation method to preventing blowing snow related accidents. It is highly effective and reduces crashes on Wyoming highways. However, it can only be effective if it is allowed to be placed in the proper locations.



Snow fences provide windbreaks for cattle.