

2/20/2021

Hello Sublette County this is Albert Sommers reporting to you on February 21, on the eve of standing committee meetings the week of February 22. House and Senate committees will start working more than 60 bills prior to the March segment of the 2021 General Session. There are four bills up next week that came out of committees that I chaired in the interim, or for which I am the prime sponsor. All bills being considered in the Legislature can be found at <https://www.wyoleg.gov/Legislation/2021>.

[HB0101](#), **Elk feedground closings-requirements** will be before the House Travel, Recreation and Wildlife Committee on Tuesday afternoon. This bill puts in place a process that must be followed if the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission believes an elk feedground should be closed. It would give the Governor the final authority to close an elk feedground, only after recommendations are received from both the Commission and the Wyoming Livestock Board. The bill requires that the Commission and the Livestock Board hold a public meeting in the affected area, with comments compiled from that public meeting submitted to the Governor.

I have heard or seen feedback that suggests I support closing elk feedgrounds. I absolutely do **NOT** support closing elk feedgrounds, and I want to ensure that a robust discussion occurs if closures are contemplated. Elk feedgrounds support large elk populations for outfitters and hunters, and they protect cattle herds by reducing co-mingling during time periods when brucellosis can be easily transmitted from elk to cattle.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) began a discussion last winter about the benefits and challenges of elk feedgrounds, including impacts of Chronic Wasting Disease. My biggest fear is that the new administration in Washington DC will eliminate the special use permits for elk feedgrounds on federal lands. My bill requires the WGFD to develop and submit a contingency plan to the Legislature, if the Feds give notice they are eliminating the authorization for an elk feedground. Despite their challenges, elk feedgrounds have provided western Wyoming robust elk herds, reduced damage to stored crops, and reduced brucellosis transmission from elk to cattle.

[HB0039](#), **Optometrist practice act amendments**, updates the practice act for Optometrists, and ensures Optometrists can treat patients in rural Wyoming to the full extent of their education and training.

[HB0061](#), **School finance recalibration**, is the vehicle to debate K12 school finance in Wyoming, and the \$300 million annual shortfall that exists in funding K12 education. I have spoken about this extensively in other updates. I believe this is the most important debate we will have in the Legislature this year, whether we fix the problem or kick the can down the road.

[SF0076](#), **Broadband development program-amendments**, updates a state broadband grant program created in 2018 that proved unusable. In an attempt to make the grant program more user friendly, the bill creates a process to fund middle mile projects, updates speed requirements, allows state agencies to partner on broadband proposals, streamlines the challenge process, eliminates matching requirements, and adjusts the application process.

I can be reached at [albert@albertsommers.com](mailto:albert@albertsommers.com) with questions or comments. This is the best email address to reach me at during session, because my legislative email can get super clogged with emails from around the state and nation.

Thanks

Albert Sommers