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States' Fence Statutes: *West Virginia*



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W. Va. Code §§ 19-17-1 to 19-17-11, 19-18-1 to 19-18-3.

Current with legislation of the 2021 Regular Session effective through June 8, 2021.

§19-17-1. Definition of lawful fence.

Every fence of the height and description hereinafter mentioned shall be deemed a lawful fence as to any horses, mules, asses, jennets, cattle, sheep, swine, or goats, which could not creep through the same, that is to say:

- (a) If built of common rails, known as the worm fence, four- and one-half feet high;
- (b) If built with posts and rails, or posts and plank, or pickets, four feet high;
- (c) If built with stone, two feet wide at base, and three and one-half feet high;
- (d) If a hedge fence, four feet high. If any hedge fence be built upon a mound, the same from the bottom of the ditch shall be included in estimating the height of such fence;
- (e) If built with posts and wire, or pickets and wire, four feet high, and shall consist of not less than six strands, the first strand five inches, the second strand ten inches, the third strand seventeen inches, the fourth strand twenty-five inches, the fifth strand thirty-six inches, and the sixth strand forty-eight inches from the ground; and if with more than six strands, the space between the strands shall in no case be greater than hereinbefore provided. The space between the posts shall, in no case, be greater than sixteen feet;
- (f) If built with posts and high tensile galvanized wire, forty-six inches high, and shall consist of not less than eight strands, the first strand four inches, the second strand nine inches, the third strand fourteen inches, the fourth strand nineteen inches, the fifth strand twenty-five inches, the sixth strand thirty-one inches, the seventh strand thirty-eight inches, and the eighth strand forty-six inches from the ground. The wire shall be maintained at no less than a two-hundred-pound tension at all times. The space between posts shall, in no case, be greater than thirty feet, provided that pressure-treated one and one-fourth inch by one and one-half inch by forty-eight-inch slotted hardwood or one and one-half inch by two inch by forty-eight inch soft wood battens are used between posts at a distance no greater than ten feet; and
- (g) If built with posts and high tensile galvanized wire and electrified, thirty-eight inches high and shall consist of not less than five strands, the first strand five inches, the second strand ten inches, the third strand seventeen inches, the fourth strand twenty-seven inches, and the fifth strand thirty-eight inches from the ground. The wire shall be maintained at no less than a two-hundred-pound tension at all times. The space between posts shall, in no case, be greater than one hundred fifty feet, provided that pressure-treated one and one-fourth inch by one and one-half inch slotted hardwood or one and one-half inch by two inch softwood battens are used between posts at a distance no greater than thirty-five feet: Provided, That if said fence is constructed to confine only horses, mules, asses, jennets, or cattle, it



shall be deemed a legal fence if it is not less than three strands, the first strand seventeen inches, the second strand twenty-seven inches and the third strand thirty-eight inches from the ground. The space between posts shall, in no case, be greater than one hundred fifty feet, provided that pressure-treated one and one-fourth inch by one and one-half inch slotted hardwood or one and one-half inch by two-inch softwood battens are used between posts at a distance no greater than thirty-five feet. Only high-powered low impedance fence controllers which comply with international safety standards shall be used to electrify fence.

All fences heretofore built under the existing law and in compliance therewith shall be and remain and may be kept up as lawful fences.

§19-17-2. Rivers and streams as lawful fences; establishment or discontinuance.

All rivers and streams, and parts thereof, within this state, which are lawful fences at the time this code takes effect, under existing laws, shall continue such until otherwise ordered by the county court of the county. The county court of any county, upon the written application of any owner or tenant of lands on any river or stream in such county, or which constitutes a boundary line thereof, may, in its discretion, by order entered of record, declare and establish such river or stream, or any part of either, a lawful fence as to any stock named in section one of this article. Notice of the application shall be given by publishing the same as a Class II legal advertisement in compliance with the provisions of article three, chapter fifty-nine of this code, and the publication area for such publication shall be the county. Any person interested may appear and oppose such application.

The county court may, upon like application and notice of any person, annul or amend any order made by said court establishing any river or stream, or any part of either, as a lawful fence; but such order shall not be made within one year from the date of the order sought to be annulled or amended, and shall not take effect until six months after it is made.

§19-17-3. Hedge fence.

All hedge fences along public roads, or division hedge fences between farms or on any land or premises, shall be kept trimmed so that their branches shall not extend into the public road, or upon the lands of an adjoining owner, more than eighteen inches over the dividing line. For failure to keep the hedge fence so trimmed, after ten days' notice in writing by the county engineer or supervisor of roads, or by parties owning the adjoining land or premises, the owner shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and, upon conviction thereof, shall be fined not exceeding one dollar for each day such fence shall remain untrimmed after the ten days' notice expires.

§19-17-4. Partition fence; liability for trespass of animals.

All partition fences shall be lawful fences, unless otherwise agreed upon by the adjoining owners by a writing executed in duplicate and duly acknowledge, in which case, if such fence be kept in good repair, there shall be the same liability for damages occasioned by trespass of animals owned by said adjoining owners as if such fence were a lawful fence.

§19-17-5. Apportionment of construction and maintenance of partition fence.

Persons owning adjoining lands, both of which are used for agricultural, horticultural, grazing or livestock purposes, shall bear a just proportion of the cost of the constructing, repairing and maintaining a partition fence between such lands.



§19-17-6. Sharing cost of constructed fences.

Where a person has chosen to let his land lie open, if he shall afterwards enclose or use such land, or portion thereof, for agricultural, horticultural, grazing or livestock purposes, he shall refund to the adjoining owner a just proportion of the value of the partition fence adjoining such lands, or portion thereof, enclosed or so used that shall have been made by such adjoining owner, regardless of whether or not such fence at the time is a lawful fence.

§19-17-7. Notice of intention to build or repair partition fence; answer.

Any person desiring to build or to repair a partition fence may give notice in writing to the owner of any adjoining lands, or to his agent, of his intention to build or repair such fence and requiring him to build or repair his just portion thereof, which notice shall state the description and kind of the fence proposed to be built or such repairs as are proposed to be made. The person so served with such notice shall, within ten days thereafter make answer in writing and serve the same upon the person desiring to build or repair such fence, which answer shall state any objections to such notice, and upon failure to do so he shall be liable to the person building or repairing such partition fence for his just proportion of the cost thereof if he shall fail to build or repair his proportion of the same.

§19-17-8. Disputes relating to partition fences.

If a dispute arises between the owners of adjoining lands concerning the proportion or particular part of a fence to be built or maintained by either of them, or the amount to be paid by one party to the other for any fence already built or maintained, either party may proceed by civil action in a magistrate or circuit court, as shall have jurisdiction of the amount or value in controversy, within the county in which any portion of the partition built or to be built, is or is to be located, to determine the amount to be paid by one party to the other for the just proportion of the costs of any construction, repair or maintenance of the partition fence. The person who is required to share in the cost of the construction, repair or maintenance of the partition fence shall not be liable for more than one half of the cost of the construction, repair or maintenance of a fence which meets the standards of subdivision (e), section one of this article.

§19-17-10. Liability of owner for refusal to repair fence.

When each of the adjoining owners of a partition fence has been allotted a particular part thereof to maintain, and either owner fails or refuses to keep in good repair the part of such fence so allotted to him, he shall be liable in damages to the adjoining owner for all damages occasioned by animals kept by him trespassing on such adjoining premises as the result of such failure or refusal to repair. The adjoining owner may serve written notice on the owner whose duty it is to keep his part of such fence in repair, requiring him to repair the same, and if such owner fails or refuses so to do within ten days after the service of such notice, the adjoining owner may repair such part of the fence, and the owner whose duty it is to keep the same in repair shall be liable to him for all the expenses of such repair.

§19-17-11. Presumptions as to sufficiency of fence.

In any controversy in which the sufficiency of a fence under the provisions of this chapter shall come in question, it shall be presumed that the same was, at the time to which such controversy relates, a lawful fence and in good condition and repair, unless the contrary be proven.

§ 19-18-1. Livestock trespassing on property of another; damages for injuries to person or property; notice to livestock owner; containment of livestock; costs for



containment.

- (a) If livestock enters the property of a landowner without that landowner's consent, the owner of the livestock is liable for damages for personal injury or property damage in a civil action in magistrate or circuit court.
- (b) The landowner must attempt to contact the owner of the trespassing livestock within forty-eight hours of the trespass. If the owner cannot be contacted within forty-eight hours, the landowner shall notify the county sheriff.
- (c) The landowner may contain the trespassing livestock on his or her property, but is not required to do so. If the landowner is able to contact the owner of the trespassing livestock pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, he or she shall also inform the owner of the costs of containment.
- (d) The owner of the trespassing livestock and the landowner shall attempt to mutually agree upon a fair cost for any containment. A fair cost for containment is an amount which would be allowed for the sheriff for containing similar livestock. If the negotiation fails, or if the landowner is not otherwise reimbursed for the costs for containment, the landowner may seek monetary damages in a civil action for these costs.

§19-18-2. Unlawful running at large of stock on road or railroad right-of-way.

- (a) If the owner of trespassing livestock cannot be determined, or if the trespassing livestock has not been recovered within ten days of notifying the owner, the county sheriff shall take possession of the trespassing livestock.
- (b) The county sheriff may return the livestock to its owner and seek reimbursement for containment costs. If attempts to return the livestock to the owner fail, the sheriff may, after publishing notice as a Class I legal advertisement, sell the livestock to the highest bidder at a public livestock auction.
- (c) The proceeds of the livestock sale shall be distributed in the following order:
 - (1) Costs incident to the sale;
 - (2) Costs of containment incurred by the sheriff and the landowner;
 - (3) Any remaining amount to the owner of the trespassing livestock; and
 - (4) If the owner is unknown or does not claim the amount remaining within ninety days, that amount shall be deposited into the county treasury.

§19-18-3. Unlawful running at large of certain male animals and swine.

- (a) While livestock may escape enclosures due to accident or unforeseen circumstances, it is unlawful for the owner of livestock to negligently permit livestock to run at large and trespass on the property of other landowners.
- (b) If livestock injures a person or destroys the property of another person while negligently trespassing, the owner of the livestock shall be given an oral or written warning for the first offense. For a second offense within six months of the first, the owner is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction thereof, shall be fined not less than \$50 nor more than \$100. For a third or subsequent offense within six months of the second or subsequent offense, the owner is guilty of a



misdemeanor and, upon conviction thereof, shall be fined not less than \$100 nor more than \$1,000.

