



Independent Record

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Race to the Sky canceled for 2026

Organizers call off annual dog sled competition this year due to lack of snow

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For the third time in six years, the Race to the Sky sled dog competition in Lincoln has been canceled, organizers announced Thursday.

"After much deliberation, the 2026 Race to the Sky is forced to cancel both the 300- and 100-mile sled dog races," race organizer Pam Beckstrom said. "It is a disappointing decision but the right one for the safety of the dogs and everyone out on the trails."

All three Rocky Mountain Triple Crown dog sled races have been canceled this year due to snow conditions: the Idaho Sled Dog Challenge, Oregon's Eagle Cap Extreme, and now the Race to the Sky.

Organizers decided the snow and trail

conditions were too challenging, with exposed bare ground and gravel, and too unsafe, with icy and rock hard trails and no ability to set a snow hook or slow down a team.

"It's way too dangerous, way too scary," Beckstrom said. "Someone would get hurt."

"With the unseasonably warm temperatures last week, freezing hard at night and no measurable snow in the forecast, we ran out of options for running this year's Montana's Race to the Sky," Beckstrom said.

Organizers thanked the trail crew, volunteers in Lincoln and Seeley Lake, and the U.S. Forest Service — both Lincoln and Seeley Lake areas — for their help. They helped identify other possibilities of trail, cut downed trees off the trail and worked to try to make the race happen.

Last year, organizers were forced to shorten the Race to the Sky because there was too much snow the first night of the



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Spectators line the course for the start of the Race to the Sky in Lincoln on Feb. 8, 2025.

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K Cunningham

PHOTO COURTESY OF KURT CUNNINGHAM

Osprey gather on the nesting deck at Spring Meadow Lake State Park in the summer of 2025. In the spring of 2025, the nesting pole was installed at the state park to mitigate issues associated with osprey nesting on nearby cellphone towers and power poles.

BIRD WATCHING

Montana FWP proposes nest camera for Helena's westside osprey, seeks comment

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People are in store for a front-row seat to the inner workings of Helena's westside osprey nest if Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks gets its way.

The agency is proposing the Spring Meadow Lake State Park Osprey Nest Camera Project and soliciting public comment until

the end of the month.

In the spring of 2025, a nesting pole was installed at the state park to mitigate issues associated with osprey nesting on nearby cellphone towers and power poles.

This nesting pole was utilized by the local osprey during the 2025 nesting season, and it is anticipated that it will be utilized again in the future, FWP says.

The osprey nest camera project would further build on the nesting pole by installing a wildlife camera on the nesting pole. The camera would allow individuals, schools, wildlife groups and anyone else who is interested and has an internet connection to observe the daily lives of these birds through the

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City offers more time for public comment

Administrative meetings for Helena also moved to 5 p.m., mayor announces

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Starting Wednesday, Helenans have a bit more time at the podium.

Helena's public comment at city meetings will now last three minutes instead of two per person, Mayor Emily Dean announced Jan. 21.

Additionally, Helena's administrative meetings will begin at 5 p.m. every other Wednesday instead of the previously scheduled 4 p.m. Administrative meetings are where city staff and commissioners meet to discuss city topics before they are finalized or put to a vote.

The goal of the change is to offer more flexibility for public commenters visiting after work, Dean said. It also may be easier on city commissioners who hold day jobs outside of public office.

Both of these changes were proposed months ago as the Helena City Commission detailed its strategic plan, a document that provides internal guidance and top priorities, Dean said.

After Dean was elected mayor, she worked with acting City Manager Brett Petty, incoming City Manager Alana Lake and city staff to make the changes. Jan. 21 marked the first administrative meeting where Dean could make them official, she said.

City Commissioner Sean Logan said he supported the change. Some public commenters thanked Dean for the extended comment time.



Dean

Former Montana Senate president pleads not guilty to misconduct, argues immunity

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The former president of the Montana Senate pleaded not guilty to a misdemeanor official misconduct charge Thursday, and his attorneys argued the case should be dismissed before trial on the grounds of legislative immunity.

Hamilton Republican Sen. Jason Ellsworth was charged last month with official misconduct after he attempted to secure a no-bid

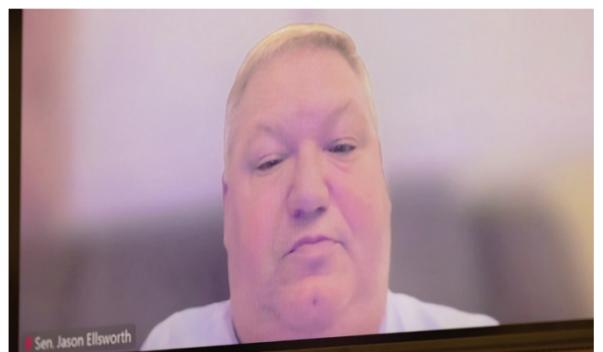
contract with a longtime friend using \$171,000 of state money he had control over as Senate President in the final days of 2024. The Montana Department of Justice is prosecuting the case.

Ellsworth and one of his longtime attorneys, Joan Mell, appeared by Zoom for his 35-minute arraignment, while his other attorney appeared in person in the Lewis and Clark County District Court room. A swarm of

state prosecutors, including Deputy Solicitor General Brent Mead, stood out in the courtroom during what was otherwise a routine omnibus hearing.

In the days leading up to Thursday's hearing, attorneys for both sides and the district court judge presiding over the case, Christopher Abbott, filed a flurry of briefs after Mell wrote that the

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SONNY TAPIA, INDEPENDENT RECORD

Sen. Jason Ellsworth, R-Hamilton, listens, on Zoom, to attorneys speak during his arraignment hearing Jan. 22, 2026, in Lewis and Clark County District Court.