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Saturday, December 27, 2025

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LOOKING BACK

TOP 5 OUTDOORS STORIES OF 2025



SAM WILSON, MISSOULIAN

A smoky haze on Sept. 26, 2025, clouds the view from inside the 2015 Thompson fire's burn scar in the Nyack region of Glacier National Park. A four-day backpacking trip through a less-traveled section of Glacier National Park at the end of September left Missoulian reporter Sam Wilson with a lot of time to think about the effects of wildfires on Montana's forests.

Renegade mountain bikers, climate change lawsuit, impacts of wildfire

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This year was a busy one for me, as I left the criminal justice beat at the Missoulian to return to covering outdoors and the environment. After feeling like I'd finally settled into the rhythm of the cops and courts beat, the departure of Missoulian reporter Joshua Murdock in April gave me a chance to return to a job I last held eight years ago, at the Daily Inter Lake in Kalispell. The timing allowed me to finish a project reporting on a pattern of questionable

rulings and behavior by Missoula District Court Judge John Larson, Montana's longest-serving district judge. Eight months later, I still sometimes feel like I'm getting my bearings on the wide-ranging outdoors beat. But already it's provided me a seemingly endless buffet of fascinating people and subjects, from renegade mountain bikers to hunting regulations to the intersection of wildfires and climate change.

Please see **OUTDOORS**, Page A2

FORT BELKNAP

Governor requests emergency declaration

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More than 700 households on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation could be forced to go without clean drinking water through the new year after high winds last week damaged the tribe's primary water storage tank. Gene Talks Different, the water plant manager for Fort Belknap Agency, said the boil order would likely last into the next week when a repair crew can come out to install a permanent fix. As a holdover, they rented a crane and draped a tarp over the gap so that birds or other objects wouldn't fly into the tank through the hole, but that won't be enough to pass muster and end the boil order. "It couldn't have happened at a worse time," Talks Different said. Gov. Greg Gianforte on Wednesday issued a request for a presidential emergency declaration to help address the damage and unlock federal aid to support the delivery of bottled



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Swan Valley plan could enact zoning

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Missoula County could soon implement restrictions on high-density commercial development in the Swan Valley after a coalition of residents created a new neighborhood plan with zoning recommendations. The plan has been in the works for the last two years following concerns of resort development in the area at Holland Lake Lodge near Condon, a rural community of roughly 300 residents. On Dec. 16, the Missoula Consolidated Planning Board unanimously approved the new neighborhood plan, teeing up the final decision to the Missoula County Commissioners in January.

Please see **SWAN VALLEY**, Page A4


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