

SUMMER ADVENTURE

A 130-MILE TREK



Keil Clavadetscher shakes out the tent after a night at Wounded Man Lake.

COURTESY PHOTOS

Montana backpackers hike across the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness

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For about three years James Haskins daydreamed about taking a long trek through the Beartooth Mountains, which contain many of Montana’s highest peaks. Poring over maps, the lifelong Billings resident visualized continuous footpaths but never pulled the trigger on a hike. This year, at the age of 57, he became more philosophical about his yearning. “Life changes, you know, and none of us know when that’s going to happen,” he said. “After a while, you get tired of just dreaming, and you decide it’s time to try. “I didn’t know if I could do it or not, but I knew I wanted to try at least.” Not wanting to undertake the journey on his own, Haskins posted on Facebook that he was seeking partners. Laurel resident Keil Clavadetscher, who knew Haskins from his time coaching his two sons on Laurel’s cross-country team, volunteered. “I love wild places and am always up for an adventure assuming life allows,” Clavadetscher wrote in an email. “For me to be able to go on this trip so James could accomplish this particular dream of his was really the least I could do after he has given so much for so many.”

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James Haskins, at left, and Keil Clavadetscher pause for a photo atop Silver Pass in the Absaroka Mounains, the last day of their seven-day wilderness trek.

Sheehy aims to remove firefighting from USFS

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A draft of a letter circulated this month in Congress, attributed to Montana Sen. Tim Sheehy, called on President Donald Trump to immediately transfer the Forest Service’s firefighting operations to a newly created federal wildfire agency. It’s emerged as a top policy goal for the Republican senator since he took office in 2025, but some lawmakers and former agency staff have warned it could prove costly and complex, and wouldn’t necessarily improve the federal response to wildfires. Citing “catastrophic wildfires” and conditions in the West, the undated, unsigned letter would seek a 90-day executive order for the “immediate and temporary consolidation” of authority for firefighting assets, funding, coordination and contracting under the new Wildland Fire Service (WFS). It’s unclear whether the letter has gained any traction among other federal lawmakers. Sheehy’s office declined to confirm or deny whether he penned the letter, or to answer any questions about potential issues with the proposal. “Last year, President Trump laid out a vision for a unified, centralized command for our federal wildfire response, and I am working to help him implement his plan,” Sheehy wrote in a statement provided by his office. Amid the peak of a record-setting year for wildfires in the West, federal officials have warned demand for firefighters and equipment is nearing record levels, and the letter asked Trump to create a national database of all federal, state and local firefighting assets that could be activated. It’s an idea Sheehy advocated for in an Aug. 10 interview on the Hotshot Wake Up podcast, while also noting he was “working on a number of executive actions to include combining our fire funding.” But some former agency officials suggested that given the timing, abruptly changing the chain-of-command for the nation’s largest firefighting force could do more harm than good. “You’re in the middle of the fight — you don’t need a distraction,” Tim Love, a retired Lolo National Forest district ranger, told the Missoulian. Love retired in 2014 after 40 years with the agency, including two decades leading the Seeley Lake Ranger District. Doug Crandall is the legislative liaison for the National Association of Forest Service Retirees, and previously served as the agency’s director of legislative affairs and a congressional staff director. A bipartisan group of senators had



Sheehy

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SHEEP CREEK MINE

Bitterroot mining project critics show up en masse

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In a show of force for the opposition to a proposed mining project in the headwaters of the Bitterroot River, around 600 people packed into a high school auditorium Tuesday evening for a series of speeches excoriating the proposal and the company behind it. The plan from U.S. Critical Materials to conduct exploration activities in the Sheep Creek drainage near the Idaho border is currently being evaluated by the Bitterroot National Forest, where the mining claims are located. Forest officials have said they are considering a categorical exclusion for the project, which would allow it to proceed without the level of environmental reviews and public engagement that is typically required. Staff from the Bitterroot Water Partnership and other groups opposed to the mining project urged attendees to submit feedback on the project to forest officials, who have opened a public comment period that extends through Sept. 13. They

How to comment on the Sheep Creek Project

The public comment on the revised Sheep Creek exploration plan opened Aug. 14 and will extend through Sept. 13. Comments can be emailed to Sheep.Creek.Comments@usda.gov, or submitted online by visiting the project website and clicking “Get Connected,” then “Comment/Object.” Comments can also be mailed or delivered to Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor’s Office, Attn: Sheep Creek Comments, 1801 N. First St., Hamilton, MT 59840.

are hoping to persuade forest officials to instead pursue an environmental assessment or environmental impact analysis of the project, both of which would require a more thorough review process.

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SAM WILSON, MISSOULIAN

Alex Ocañas, with Bitterroot Water Partnership, speaks to a crowd of about 600 at the Hamilton High School Performing Arts Center on Tuesday. A series of speakers addressed the crowd to voice their opposition to the Sheep Creek mining exploration project.