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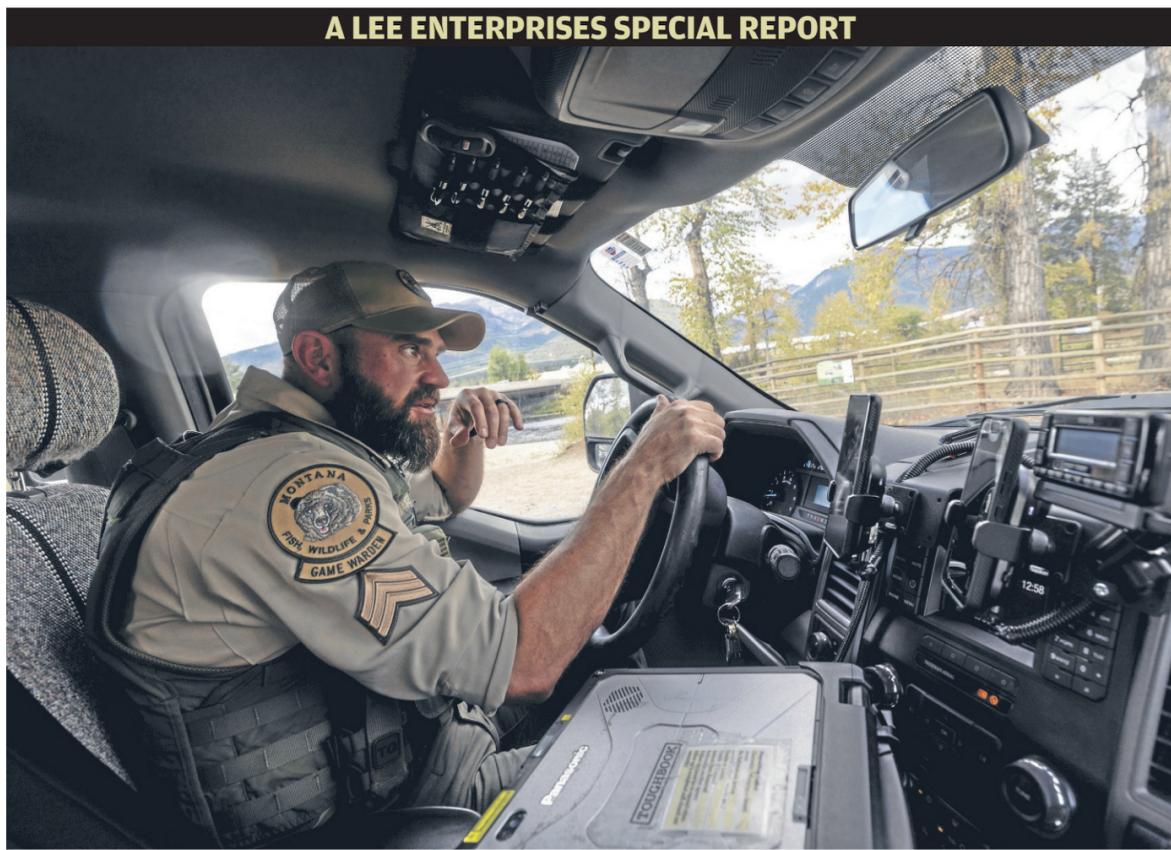
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A LEE ENTERPRISES SPECIAL REPORT



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Lou Royce, a game warden sergeant based in the Bitterroot Valley, patrols the Poker Joe fishing access site on the Bitterroot River near Florence last month. Royce has investigated all kinds of wildlife crimes and poaching cases in his nearly two decades working for the state.

Equine nonprofit forced to move

Rescue program has until end of April to find new a location

JESSICA ABELL
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The Wings Programs Inc. equine rescue in Corvallis is looking for a new home after the property they currently lease was sold.

The nonprofit has until the end of April to find a suitable location, according to Executive Director Debora Lay, but their rent has been raised \$2,000 a month in the meantime.

"We've got a couple of irons in the fire," Lay said. "But you never know if they're going to pan out or what's going to happen."

Wings is currently home to more than 20 equines including horses, ponies, mini horses and donkeys. The mini horses are regular fixtures at events in the Bitterroot Valley and even make visits to local senior care facilities.

Please see **MOVE**, Page A2

SILENT SLAUGHTER

Warden estimates majority of poaching cases go unsolved, undetected

DAVID ERICKSON | david.erickson@missoulian.com

Lou Royce, a game warden sergeant based in the Bitterroot Valley, has seen and investigated all kinds of wildlife crimes and poaching cases in his nearly two decades working for the state in various positions. This part of Montana has long been a hotspot for poaching.

There have been incidents of kids with guns in cars going on a "thrill kill" rampage on deer, or more nefarious cases like the man who poached nine trophy black bears out of one area near Darby.

He specifically remembers a case of houndsmen illegally treeing a mountain lion with the aid of dogs and then calling a friend with a permit to drive a long distance to shoot the animal — a practice that's illegal in Montana.

Please see **POACHING**, Page A5

About this series

The vast majority of the Montana's hunters operate within regulations designed to ensure the health of one of the state's most coveted and protected resources: its wildlife. But not all. As stories of headless elk, shot wolves and illegally taken bears, antelope and mule deer keep popping up, Lee Enterprises took aim at answering some of the deeper questions about poaching across Big Sky Country. This series examines the costs, challenges and trends that law enforcement, lawmakers and prosecutors face as they attempt the daunting job of stopping poachers.

Daines quiet on possible Bodnar race

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FORT HARRISON — Republican U.S. Sen. Steve Daines offered little comment on Saturday when asked about a potential matchup against

recently departed University of Montana President Seth Bodnar.

"We'll see if he actually gets in the race," Daines said in an interview at Fort Harrison. "We've got to wait and see."

Insider speculation about Bodnar entering the race as an independent candidate burst into the open last month after former U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, a Democrat, signaled he'd support the university president as a third-party challenger over anyone in the Democratic field.

Please see **DAINES**, Page A2

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