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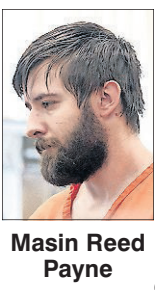
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# Libby man pleads guilty to assaulting infant son

By **SCOTT SHINDLEDECKER**  
The Western News

A Libby man accused of beating his infant son last year is facing several years in prison after he pleaded guilty last month in Lincoln County District Court.

Masin Reed Payne, 25, was charged with felony assault on



a minor, victim under 36 months, serious injury. On Aug. 25, he pleaded guilty to the charge. His sentencing is scheduled for Oct. 20.

According to court documents, a plea deal, if it is followed by District Judge Matt Cuffe, calls for Payne to serve time in the Montana State Prison.

In the plea deal, county attorney Marcia Boris will argue for a 20-year sentence, with 10 years suspended. Defense attorney Maury Solomon will argue for a 20-year sentence, with 15 year suspended.

Previous court filings detail the child’s abuse involving nine broken ribs, bruising on his head, severe bruising on the child’s buttocks, the back of his thighs and genital area.

His bail was originally set at \$150,000 before he was released on his own recognizance July 8, 2024.

Payne pleaded not guilty

June 17, 2024, to assaulting his son, who was 4 months old at the time.

According to the affidavit of probable cause filed by Boris, the offenses alleged against Payne happened earlier this year, between Jan. 24 and May 19.

See PLEADS, A7

PATRIOT DAY



Members of the Libby and Plains-Thompson Falls-St. Regis soccer teams joined Sanders Co. first responders in a recognition event Thursday, Sept. 11, in Thompson Falls. (Photo courtesy Nick Lawyer/Thompson Falls High School)

# Communities gather to remember 9/11

By **NICK SAWYER**

*EDITOR’S NOTE: Thompson Falls-Plains-St. Regis soccer coach Nick Lawyer submitted this story and we are grateful to publish it.*

The scoreboard will say that the Thompson Falls-Plains-St. Regis girls soccer team was leading Libby 1-0 when lightning forced the match to be suspended on Thursday, Sept. 11. But for those who filled the stands

at Thompson Falls High School that night, the game was never the biggest story.

Under the glow of the setting sun and the shadow of an approaching thunderstorm, the community came together to honor local heroes on Patriot Day. Nearly 50 first responders from across Sanders County — fire, police, medical, healthcare, the Sheriff’s Department, and Search and Rescue — were recognized for their service.

Families, students, and fans from Thompson Falls, Plains, St. Regis, Libby and Trout Creek packed the stands for what was planned as both a soccer doubleheader and a community tribute.

The evening began with a moment to remember those lost on Sept. 11, 2001. Then, Noxon High School senior Finn Duffy delivered a rousing electric guitar rendition of the national anthem, filling the crowd with prideful emotions and positivity before kickoff.

Host team co-captin Solveig Nygaard threaded a perfect pass through the defense and fellow captain Kathrine Wrobleski scored to give TF-Plains-St. Regis a 1-0 lead. Moments later, however, lightning forced officials to stop play.

As thunder echoed outside, the celebration shifted indoors. In the Thompson Falls gymnasium, first responders took their place in the bleachers while the high school players gathered

See 9/11, A7

# Sheehy, Cantwell fire legislation passes Senate unanimously

By **JORDAN HANSEN**  
Daily Montanan

Federal legislation introduced jointly by U.S. Sens. Tim Sheehy, R-Montana, and Maria Cantwell, D-Washington, seeks to establish a fire weather program at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The legislation passed the Senate unanimously on Sept. 10.

“As a former aerial firefighter, one of my top priorities since taking office has been to reform our federal wildland firefighting apparatus to better protect our communities,” Sheehy said in a press release. “The Fire Ready Nation Act ensures we can better predict these disasters and respond quickly to prevent the devastation to families, homes, and businesses that is caused by catastrophic wildfire.”

Fire weather describes certain conditions that lead to an elevated level of alert. Wind and humidity, for example, are two factors taken into account. Wildfire smoke is also tracked by federal agencies, and that information is then disseminated to the public. Many state agencies, including Montana’s Department of Environmental Quality, also track smoke impacts.

Earlier this year, Cantwell said more than 300,000 acres burned in Washington last year, and wildfires in California in January demonstrated the nation was facing “costly, unpredictable wildfires year-round.”

“The Fire Ready Nation Act can help save homes and lives by giving scientists and weather

See FIRE, A7

# Ross Creek Cedars reopen

The Western News

After a summer’s worth of work, the Ross Creek Cedars area in the Kootenai National Forest is open to the public again.

The closure order was lifted last week and open to everyone Friday, Sept. 12.

The new Ross Creek Nature Trail No. 405 is now classified as a Trail Class 5-Fully Developed Trail. The main priority of the project was to provide full accessibility and make the trail sustainable to nature’s elements.

Retired Montana State Highway Patrol Officer Sgt. John “Buck” O’Neill and his wife Bonnie were able to enjoy the new byway, successfully navigating the full trail, thanks to the accessibility improvements.

These improvements included the following:

- Construction of almost one mile of new trail using compacted gravel materials, producing a firm and stable trail surface to provide a user-friendly, all-season trail for all types and ages of visitors, including strollers and wheelchairs;
- Installation of 16 new, heavy-duty benches dispersed throughout the Cedars;
- Three new trail bridges;
- Addition of approximately 200 feet of boardwalk;
- Five new wooden walkways, constructed utilizing logs or planks to traverse wet or boggy areas of a trail;
- Designated spur trails were developed to lead into and around character trees. These trails will help protect cedar groves and other vegetation from the high visitation rates.

Kootenai National Forest officials were thankful to everyone who worked on the project.

For more information on the Ross Creek Cedars, call the Three Rivers Ranger District at 406-295-4693.

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