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Ross Creek Cedars closed to motorized traffic in 2026

By **SCOTT SHINDLEDECKER**
 The Western News

Motorists hoping for a drive on the Ross Creek Cedar Scenic area loop are out of luck in 2026.

Due to the extent of the damage to the road and repairs needed, Kootenai National Forest officials said the road will not be open to motorized vehicles this summer.

The area sustained massive damage in the December 2025 flooding. While crews are working to clear the Ross Creek Cedars Nature loop and road, near Troy, to the area to allow for better access, there is no definitive time frame for when it may re-open.

"It was virtually turned upside down," Kootenai National Forest Supervisor

Chad Benson said at a May 6 Lincoln County Commission meeting. "The actual fix is years away. It's open for bicyclists and hikers, but the roads need fixed, everything we did last year, it's tough to see \$1 million worth of work washed away. There couldn't be a worse scenario."

Benson also expressed his thanks to the community for

its continued patience and cooperation.

While the road is closed to motorized vehicles, it remains open for public access via hiking or biking.

Visitors are asked to use caution and watch for hazardous trees, debris and uneven walking surfaces. Officials also said it is best to avoid edges of slumping roads or trails and

abide all warning signs.

Restrooms and garbage services will not be available while the road remains closed to vehicles, so please practice Leave No Trace principles and help keep the area clean.

Work will continue in an attempt to clear the area for public access throughout the summer, officials said in a

See **CEDARS, A5**

TORCH RUN



Participants in the annual Lincoln County Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics get ready to ride Thursday, May 8, 2026. They had an escort by Sheriff Darren Short and Capt. Anthony Jenson. (Scott Shindledecker/The Western News)

Troy man found guilty in road-rage incident

By **SCOTT SHINDLEDECKER**
 The Western News

A Troy man was found guilty for his role in a road-rage incident involving a gun nearly three years ago on U.S. 2 near the Kootenai River Falls.

Jurors, 10 women and two men, determined Michael B. O'Toole, 70, was guilty of two felony counts of criminal endangerment following a three-day trial that ended April 29. They also declared him not guilty of one endangerment count.

O'Toole was first charged with one felony count of assault with a weapon. But that was amended following the death of the victim, Brian Hamond, a retired law enforcement officer from Spokane, Washington. He died May 11, 2025.

Hamond was a detective who helped solve Washington's oldest homicide case. It involved the 1959 murder of 9-year-old Candice Rogers.

According to the Spokesman-Review, John Reigh Hoff was identified as the killer in 2021 through DNA evidence. Hoff, 31, killed himself with a gunshot to the head in 1970.

O'Toole, a former California resident, has been free after posting \$25,000 bail and will remain so until his June 22 sentencing. County attorney Marcia Boris sought to have the defendant detained in the county jail, but District Judge Matt Cuffe denied the request.

Boris was pleased with the verdict and the work of the jurors. She also said O'Toole was offered a plea deal, but he declined it.

The prosecution called eight witnesses, including two law enforcement officers and the three men who helped stop the incident.

Boris expressed her admiration for the three young men who witnessed the incident as

See **RAGE, A6**

Libby Legion Auxiliary gearing up for Poppy Day, Memorial Day events

The Western News

The American Legion Auxiliary Austin Reedy Unit #97 will be conducting its annual Memorial Poppy Distribution Day Saturday, May 16.

Connecting the visual image of the poppy with the sacrifice of service made by our veterans has been an important goal of the American Legion Auxiliary

Poppy Program since its inception in 1921.

On Memorial Day and Veterans Day, millions of red crepe paper poppies are distributed across the country in exchange for donations that go directly to assist disabled and hospitalized veterans in our communities.

Auxiliary volunteers will be distributing poppies from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Ace Hardware, Empire Foods, Family Dollar, Rosauer's and

Save Rite (west).

At 1 p.m. Saturday, May 23, the annual Angel Dedication ceremony will take place at Libby Cemetery, located at 1004 Treasure Avenue.

The ceremony includes live music by Libby Strings and Things featuring musicians Edwina Smith, Patty Burlingame and Kathy Powers.

Also, there will be a prayer, keynote address by Auxiliary Scholarship recip-

ient Ashley Cockerham of Libby High School, reading of a Proclamation by Mayor Hugh Taylor and the placing of Memorial wreaths at the Angel by American Legion Auxiliary Chaplain Cathy Neff and Adrene Adams representing Gold Star Families.

The public is invited to lay flowers or wreaths as well. The ceremony concludes with the playing of Taps.





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