

2023 CHEVROLET TAHOE HIGH COUNTRY

LEATHER HEATED & VENTED SEATS - POWER 3RD ROW - 2ND ROW BUCKET SEATS

\$64,995

LIBBY
Auto Sales

406-293-7717 • libbyautosales.com

\$1.25

Serving South Lincoln County since 1902

THE WESTERN NEWS

TheWesternNews.com

Tuesday, July 21, 2026

Libby, Montana

Volume 125, No. 58

Trustees tab Kelly as new elementary principal

By SCOTT SHINDLEDECKER
The Western News

Libby Elementary School has a new principal for the 2026-27 school year.

Timberly Kelly will take the reins of leadership following her selection by school trustees at its last meeting.

Kelly was one of three candi-

dates interviewed by the trustees.

Kelly, a native from Northwest Montana in Paradise, has an impressive resume with a 30-year career of teaching and working as an administrator in Montana schools.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to be back in Northwestern Montana for

sure," Kelly said. "My husband and I have deep roots in this part of the state. My husband's mother, Patricia (Palmer) Kelly, grew up in Libby, and his father grew up in Paradise. My parents moved here from Hamilton before I was born. I grew up in Paradise, went to Paradise Grade School through eighth grade, then graduated from

Plains High School."

Kelly also shared that her mother-in-law's sister Val and brother-in-law Bill Johnston were a well-established part of the Libby community.

Following her graduation from Plains, Kelly attended the University of Montana



See KELLY, A10
Timberly Kelly



A Minuteman fire fighting helicopter gains elevation after filling up with Kootenai River water Friday, July 17, 2026, for use on the Tub Gulch Fire north of Libby. (Scott Shindledecker/The Western News)

Lightning strikes spur fire crews into action

By SCOTT SHINDLEDECKER
The Western News

Wildfire season roared into Northwest Montana last week after hundreds of lightning strikes spawned dozens of fires.

Lincoln County saw the bulk of the strikes following a series of thunderstorms Thursday and Friday. Sanders and Mineral counties also saw some lightning-caused fires while Flathead County had a few starts as well.

The Forest recently went into "High" fire danger status after multiple weeks at "Medium."

Kootenai National Forest officials announced a trail closure for the Williams Creek Trail and Scenery Mountain Trail network west of Libby.

The Williams Fire, first reported July 8, is the largest fire and was listed at 21 acres Saturday night with a federal Interagency Hotshot Crew

See FIRE, A9

Significant injuries avoided in two-vehicle wreck on U.S. 2

By SCOTT SHINDLEDECKER
The Western News

Seat belts, an air bag and a brush guard all played roles in preventing serious injuries in a Friday afternoon traffic accident in Libby.

The crash, which is under investigation due to the suspicion of alcohol use, occurred at about noon on U.S. 2 near the Shaugnessy Road intersection in Libby. It resulted in a decrease of traffic lane use while it was cleaned up and investigated.

Montana Highway Patrol Sgt. Andrew Horton is the investigating officer in the accident.

Sgt. Horton told The Western News a 1998 tan Toyota Tacoma pickup truck with Lincoln County, Montana plates was at Saverite South when the driver attempted to make a left-hand turn from the lot and failed to yield to the driver of a 2011 red Toyota Prius with Idaho plates, which was traveling south on U.S. 2.

Both vehicles sustained severe front-end damage, but

Horton said injuries to both drivers were minor and didn't require transport to the hospital.

An air bag was deployed in the Prius while the drivers of both vehicles reportedly wore seat belts. The pickup was fitted with a brush guard.

Several first responders were at the scene, including MHP, Libby Volunteer Fire Department, Libby Volunteer Ambulance, Lincoln County Sheriff's Office and Libby Police Department.

They checked on the drivers of each vehicle, provided traffic control and cleaned the scene of debris left from the collision.

Two tow trucks were also at the scene to remove the disabled vehicles.

Horton and others involved were thankful the crash didn't result in significant injuries or worse.

It proved to be an extremely busy day for area first responders, particularly fire crews, who were also involved in extinguishing a fire Friday evening at the Lincoln County Landfill outside of Libby.



Montana Highway Patrol Sgt. Andrew Horton examines a 2011 Toyota Prius Friday, July 17, 2026, which was involved in a two-vehicle accident on U.S. 2, near the Shaugnessy Road intersection. (Scott Shindledecker/The Western News)

Where All Your Dreams Come True!

Licensed and Insured

LIKE US ON FACEBOOK!

@ Cabinet Peak Construction

CABINET PEAK
CONSTRUCTION LLC

DAVID TROYER
OWNER/CONTRACTOR

406.334.4944

cabinetpeakconstruction@gmail.com