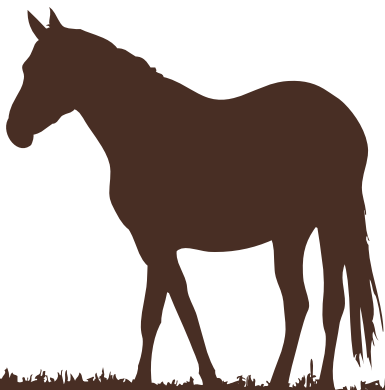


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\$1 “Wild Horse Plains”



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Northwest Montana communities pay tribute on 9/11

By JOHN HAMILTON Clark Fork Valley Press

The soccer matches did not go down as scheduled, but the large tribute to first responders and all area emergency personnel certainly did. In a different yet just as meaningful manner.

Honoring the somber memory of Sept. 11, 2001 on Patriot Day 2025 last Thursday with a special ceremony planned and organized by Thompson Falls-Plains-St. Regis head girls coach Nick Lawyer, the girls and boys had their games with visiting Libby at Previs Field in Thompson Falls called off due to a severe late-summer thunderstorm.

Actually, the girls managed to get a few minutes of their game in before the lightning delay, and Claire Wroblewski, off an assist from Solvig Nygaard, had scored a goal to give TF-P-SR 1-0 at that point, before the decision was made to suspend play. Since the conditions never did allow the resumption of play that stormy night in T-Falls, the schools are working on rescheduling the matches to a later date.

In honor of our local heroes on Patriot Day,



A LARGE CONINGENT of emergency personnel joined the Thompson Falls-Plains and Libby soccer teams in a special Patriot Day event held at TFHS Thursday. (Courtesy photo)



LOCAL EMERGENCY WORKERS joined the Plains-Thompson Falls and Libby teams in celebrating Patriot Day 2025 at TFHS Thursday. (Courtesy photo)

nearly 50 first responders from across Sanders County – fire and police department personnel, medical and health care professionals, the Sheriff’s Department and local Search and Rescue volunteers and paraprofessionals – were all there and publicly recognized for their vital services to the communities they serve.

Since the weather was not cooperating with the games or planned ceremony outside, the tribute to emergency personnel was moved inside of the TFHS gym, and Lawyer said

it was a moving experience for all involved. He described the special event.

“First responders took their place in the bleachers while the high school players gathered around them,” Lawyer said. “What followed was an impromptu community conversation — about what it means to be a first responder, the sacrifices of Sept. 11, and the heroes Sanders County has lost over the years. The players (including those from Libby) stood and applauded their

guests, recognizing the commitment and courage that keep their towns safe.”

Lawyer felt the moment was bigger than any mere sporting event or other social gathering. “Our kids are learning that being a good teammate isn’t just about soccer,” he said. “It’s about showing up, working hard, staying positive and supporting one another – the same qualities our first responders live out every day. They are the ultimate teammates for our community.”

Lawyer said the Patriot Day tribute actually began earlier with the playing of the national anthem on Previs Field, which was a rousing electric guitar rendition of America’s pride song performed by Noxon High School senior Finn Duffy.

Back to the business of high school soccer, Lawyer said the Hawk girls lost an 8-0 decision to powerhouse Columbia Falls in Columbia Falls Tuesday. Both Hawk soccer squads return to action hosting Bigfork at Amundson Complex in Plains Tuesday and traveling to Whitefish Thursday.

Busy week for fire crews in region

Clark Fork Valley Press

Fire danger on the Lolo National Forest was lowered to moderate on Monday following a round of rain and cooler temperatures.

The rating shift came after a busy week for firefighters responding to a handful of small fires across Mineral and Sanders counties.

The Cayuse Fire cropped up about 2.5 miles southeast of Lozeau in the Deep Creek area. It was estimated at 1.5 acres and crews were mopping up on Wednesday.

Also on the Superior Ranger District, the Graham Fire burned about half an acre near Tarkio. Firefighters contained the blaze on Sept. 9.

The Cruzane Mountain Fire was a mile northeast of Saltese. A heavy downpour aided in efforts to contain the blaze that was less than an acre.

On the Plains and Thompson Peak Ranger District, the Pricilla Mountain Fire sparked up 10 miles northeast of Thompson Falls. Crews first attacked the fire on Sept. 10 with the help of helicopters and fixed-wing air tankers. It was estimated at 2.25 acres on Sept. 12 and was fully contained.

The CSKT Division of Fire reported Sept. 8 the Burgess Fire burned 20 acres west of Dixon. The Ferry Basin fire was at 13 acres, also near Dixon. Both were started by lightning.



The Cayuse Creek Fire was reported about 10 p.m. Sunday evening from a lightning strike and crews responded immediately. The area is about 11 miles southeast of Superior and was contained at about 7 acres 2 days later. Along with the USFS, the Superior Volunteer Fire Department also assisted. (Photos by Shawn Heyer, Meadow Creek Contracting)



RESPONDING USFS Fire Teams could easily see the Cayuse Creek fire as they responded up 2nd Creek early Monday morning (Photos by USFS)

PSC vice president Fielder wants utility board’s president gone

By AMANDA EGGERT Montana Free Press

Interpersonal conflict among Montana’s elected utility board and the staff that work for them escalated a few notches this week amid a first-of-its-kind attempt to unseat its president, Brad Molnar.

The PSC is the board tasked with balancing the financial health of monopoly utilities with the concerns of its customers, who cannot shop around for service from other utility companies. All of its current members, who are elected by district, are Republicans.

The agency and the commissioners who lead it have wrestled with political infighting, staff turnover, inadequate financial controls and office culture issues in recent years. Agency dysfunction has come with a financial cost: In the past three years, the state has paid \$330,000 to settle two lawsuits filed by former agency employees over claims related to wrongful termination and privacy violations.

The subject of Wednesday’s meeting was PSC Vice President Jennifer Fielder’s request to Republican Gov. Greg Gianforte that Molnar be placed on administrative leave while an independent investigator looks into Molnar’s workplace conduct. Molnar has bristled against the allegations and investigation, securing legal counsel and holding a press conference last month arguing

that agency staff are trying to oust him for surfacing his concerns about the agency’s preference for conducting its business in “secrecy,” to the detriment of utility ratepayers.

At the Sept. 3 PSC meeting in Helena, Molnar said the three-person response team investigating his conduct has decided to “spend \$10,000 of ratepayer money because Brad Molnar told a joke somebody didn’t like.” He also argued that the stakes with the administrative leave request are high, amounting to an “overturning of an election” by a three-person response team investigating his conduct.

Fielder sent the letter to Gianforte on Aug. 20 as one of the members of the response team assembled to “address reports of workplace misconduct and stop retaliation against those who exercise their rights to a workplace free from harassment and discrimination.” She wrote that proceeding under the current conditions is “not possible with [Molnar’s] presence in the workplace” and lamented during the Wednesday afternoon meeting that Molnar has continued to obstruct the investigation and has failed “to accept responsibility for his actions and his conduct.”

Recently elected commissioner Jeff Welborn of Dillon presided over the commission’s proceedings, which started with PSC staff highlighting the challenging