

# Clark Fork VALLEY PRESS

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## Plains High celebrates Homecoming week

By **TRACY SCOTT**  
Valley Press

Fall is in the air, and that means Homecoming Week for the Plains School District. Months of planning and preparation go into the annual celebration, and this year was no exception.

The week began with students decorating the school halls with displays of Horsemen pride while also participating in a variety of themed dress-up days. Elementary students kicked off the week with Crazy Hair Day on Monday, while high school students celebrated Meme Monday. Tuesday's theme brought a tropical flair to the school as both elementary and high school students dressed in Hawaiian attire.

One of the most anticipated events of the week took place on Wednesday with the annual Horsemen Olympics. Students participated in a variety of competitions, including touch football, volleyball, tug-of-war, and a new obstacle course challenge that added an extra twist. Participants were required to navigate hurdles, crawl under barriers, climb through tires, collect items and maneuver around cones while wearing impairment-simulation goggles that distorted their vision and perception.

The Horsemen Olympics continue to be a highlight of Homecoming Week, thanks to the efforts of numerous staff members and students. Social studies teacher Ken Nelson, who has helped organize the event for 24 years, said one of the biggest challenges is creating new and exciting activities each year to keep students engaged.

Providing play-by-play coverage of the day's events were student announcers Aubree



**PLAINS CHEERLEADERS** and football team members ride in the homecoming parade. (Tracy Scott/Valley Press)



**PLAINS High School senior Aly Roy** gets tagged by Hayden Rice during the football game in the Plains Horsemen Olympics. (Tracy Scott/Valley Press)



**PLAINS FRESHMAN Cole Albertson** sporting his shaving cream hairdo. (Tracy Scott/Valley Press)



**PLAINS SCHOOL Superintendent Ryan Rettig** and coach Mike Tatum start the bon fire. (Tracy Scott/Valley Press)

Butcher and Mia Equall, whose commentary helped keep spectators informed and entertained throughout the competitions.

The 2026 Horsemen Olympics crowned several

class champions during Homecoming Week's spirited competitions. The sophomores earned top honors in the dress-up day contests, winning meme Monday, western day and celebrity day.

The seniors dominated many of the athletic and team events, claiming victories in tug-o-war, cheer games, hospital bed races, the obstacle course and powder puff football.

When the final points

were tallied, the sophomores emerged as overall champions. The juniors finished second with 32 points, followed closely by the seniors with 31 points. The freshmen rounded out the standings

with 24 points. Wednesday's Homecoming festivities continued into the evening with a community parade featuring 14 floats. Participants included several pieces of equipment from the Town of Plains Volunteer Fire Department, two ambulances from Plains Community Ambulance, and a truck and trailer provided by Von Construction and Land Management carrying cheerleaders and members of the school's athletic teams.

Following the parade, students, families, and community members returned to the school for team recognitions and special announcements. During the program, High School Principal Dr. Heidii Fettinger was recognized for securing a \$5,000 grant from T-Mobile. The award was presented by T-Mobile Service Manager Shawn Wallace. The Plains School District was one of only three school districts

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## Lake County commissioners consider no longer collecting irrigation fees

By **HANNAH SHIELDS**  
Hagadone News Network  
Report for America

A spike in fees paid by irrigation divisions has Lake County officials reevaluating the county's role as fee collector.

Commissioners met on Sept. 30 to discuss stopping the collection of fees from irrigation divisions. The fees are collected by way of property tax bills and help finance the Flathead Indian Irrigation Project, a federally run program under the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

It's a debate county officials have had with the Flathead Irrigation District — a collective of the Camas, Jocko and Mission Valley irrigation divisions — since 2021.



**A HERD of nearly 130 bison** graze on pastures at the Page Bison Ranch near Hot Springs on Aug. 10, 2026. (Hannah Shields/Daily Inter Lake)

When commissioners passed a resolution in 2022 to remove the fee from property tax bills in July 2023, irrigators argued it would subject

them to multiple layers of red tape.

The resolution was rescinded by commissioners in March 2023 after they failed to get

an answer on the legal ramifications of the move. Commissioner Gale Decker returned to the issue three years later after reading about the irrigation project's recent rate increase in the Daily Inter Lake.

It's getting harder for property owners in irrigation divisions to pay their property tax bills, he said, and the county can't accept a property tax bill with unpaid irrigation fees. It also puts the onus on the county to enforce regulations.

"If you don't pay irrigation fees, we can take your property," chimed in Commissioner Steve Stanley. "And that really bugs me."

To get out of paying the irrigation fee, land-

owners can petition the U.S. Department of Interior to remove their land from the irrigation project, said Attorney Cassie Dellwo, who represents the Flathead Irrigation District. But she and other irrigation project officials have said the process is lengthy and difficult.

Property owners can also request a fee waiver from the irrigation project, she said, but these requests are usually granted to those who haven't received water delivery due to infrastructure issues.

She reminded commissioners that the county is obligated under state statute and federal contract to collect the fees. Getting out of it would require a

change in legislation and filing a declaratory judgment against the federal government.

"Nobody's coming here to have a big fight," Dellwo said. "The biggest goal here is to avoid unnecessary expenses to the irrigators and all of the county taxpayers."

Meanwhile, the Flathead Irrigation District is looking to take back control of the project from the Bureau of Indian Affairs by forming a cooperative management entity with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe, she said. The partnership would give irrigation districts direct management over the project and the ability to create their own budget.

See **IRRIGATION** on Page A8

## Bridge work proposed for Prospect Creek Road west of T-Falls

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The Montana Department of Transportation is seeking public comment on a proposal to repair and stabilize the banks of the bridge crossing over Prospect Creek on Secondary Highway

471, commonly known as Prospect Creek Road, about 18 miles west of Thompson Falls.

Proposed work includes erosion repair, bank stabilization, channel grading, bridge end paving and other work. The purpose of the project is to restore the channel banks and roadway due to flood

related damage.

Construction is tentatively planned for 2028 depending on completion of design and availability of funds. The estimated cost for construction has yet to be determined. No new right-of-way should be needed. Utility relocations may be needed.

Partnering with the

community is an important part of properly planning for future projects. The transportation department welcomes the public to provide ideas and comments on the proposed project. Comments may be submitted online at [mdt.mt.gov/contact/comment-form.aspx](https://mdt.mt.gov/contact/comment-form.aspx) or in writing to

Montana Department of Transportation, Missoula office, PO Box 7039, Missoula, MT 59807-7039. Please note that comments are for project UPN 10761000.

The public is encouraged to contact Joel Boucher Missoula District Project Development Engineer at 406-544-

5802 or Project Design Engineer Josh Dold at 406-444-6385 with questions or comments about the project.

For more information about active MDT projects around the state, please visit our website and MDT's five-year Tentative Construction Plan.