

Our Thanksgiving Day Edition will publish on Wednesday, November 23rd. The Independent Record will not publish a print version of the newspaper on Thursday, November 24, so our employees can observe Thanksgiving with their families. Look for our digital e-edition on Thanksgiving at helenair.com.

Have a safe and happy Thanksgiving!

Independent Record



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FWP stocking Arctic grayling

Debate continues on fish's fate in Big Hole River **PAGE A2**



Shooting in Colorado

Five killed, 25 injured after man opens fire at nightclub Saturday evening **PAGE A8**

Monday, November 21, 2022

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MEGAN MICHELOTTI, INDEPENDENT RECORD

A woman who lives nearby drops by to see what new books United Way's neighborhood pantry has in stock.

United Way's neighborhood pantry prepares for winter

People can find 'a little bit of everything' at location in Helena

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From food to vacuums, décor, winter clothes and more, United Way's neighborhood pantry at 75 E. Lyndale Avenue offers a variety of free items for anyone who needs them.

"We just decided we have a nice location because people walk by here all the time," said executive director of United Way Emily McVey. "A lot of people don't know (the pantry) is there until they know it is there because it's kind of tucked away,

but it's a nice spot. Sometimes we have people come up and sit to get out of the rain and have a snack."

United Way Worldwide asks all the United Way organizations around the country to do a Day of Caring, a day for service projects, each year. Around two years ago during the pandemic, United Way partnered with the Neighborhood Pantry Project to set up its own neighborhood pantry for its Day of Caring.

The Neighborhood Pantry Project is a local donation-based nonprofit that operates a network of free community pantries around Helena. It has four other pantries separate from United Way's pantry at 1526 Cleveland St., 12 E. Lawrence St., 44 N.

Last Chance Gulch and 122 N. Rodney St.

"We have people that come by and drop things in the pantry after hours, and we'll go out there to fill it up one day, and I'm like 'Oh, there's already stuff out here,'" said McVey.

Ever since McVey posted about United Way's food pantry on Nov. 2 in the Facebook group Helena Classifieds that has almost 40,000 members, she said she sees someone new using the pantry along with regulars every day.

"As people have known about it, we've seen a general increase, especially the last couple of weeks since I put that Facebook post up — all of a sudden we've had a constant flow of people,"

stated McVey.

The pantry is always looking for food donations that don't need to be cooked like canned soup or granola bars. It gets bread from the Salvation Army twice a week, so it's always looking for things that pair well with bread — peanut butter or tuna for example.

"We've been putting out the emergency food packs from Helena Food Share. Those have been really popular because they come with a protein and a water," said McVey.

In addition to food, the pantry has toiletries available like deodorant, toothpaste, etc. In the winter, blankets, hats, coats

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Board of education upholds staff ratios

School librarian and counselor minimums to remain in Montana

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MISSOULA — Existing staffing ratios for librarians, counselors and administrative positions will stay the same following an enormous outpouring of public comment to the Montana Board of Public Education.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Elsie Arntzen recommended eliminating state-mandated ratios for those positions in an effort to emphasize local control with accreditation standards, which raised concerns among many education stakeholders.

More than 1,200 public comments were submitted urging the board to retain the current ratios for counselors. Another 1,000 wrote in support of staffing ratios for school librarians, and about 200 public comments were sent in concerning principals and superintendents.

"We have guardrails in place to guide schools," said board member Anne Keith. "I think ratios are guardrails that I'm not willing to give up since there is a variance to standards process that you can follow to show that your local control can go above and beyond these minimums."

Throughout the public comment process, many experts and community members voiced concerns that eliminating staffing ratios altogether would allow school boards to cut those positions when their budgets get tight.

Deputy Superintendent Sharyl Allen disagreed that school boards would "immediately start cutting people" and argued that ratios only hurt smaller, more rural schools.

Board member Tammy Lacey

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Protesters take on Forest Service over old-growth trees

Environmental and conservation groups hold rally in Missoula

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MISSOULA — In Dr. Seuss' "The Lorax," the famed rhyme-writer conjured a furry, mustachioed creature to "speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues."

Outside the U.S. Forest Service Region 1 headquarters in Missoula last Monday, the trees spoke for themselves. With seasoned activists dressed up as trees, a group of protesters from

a cross-section of environmental and wildlife conservation groups assembled on the steps of the agency's office at the historic Fort Missoula at 12:30 p.m. With signs, petitions, maps, speeches and hot chocolate — and a few pine boughs taped to heads and extremities — the group demonstrated for an hour amid soft snow and chilly temperatures.

Their core demand was simple. They wanted the Forest Service to make a permanent rule protecting mature and old-growth trees from being cut down. The threats to those trees, however, are far more complex, they said, ranging from logging projects and forest treatments aimed at re-

ducing wildfire risk (the premise of which the groups dismissed as bogus "chainsaw medicine") to how the agency inventories old-growth stands and the whether young forests can mature into old growth and make up for current logging. Speakers described the federal agency as a pro-logging bureaucracy reluctant to follow orders to inventory and protect mature and old-growth timber stands that hold immense value for the environment and logging industry alike.

The trees, the protesters repeatedly stated, are "worth more standing."

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ANTONIO IBARRA, LEE NEWSPAPERS

Adam Rissien, rewilding manager with WildEarth Guardians, speaks in front of rallygoers as he denounces actions taken by the U.S. Forest Service regarding commercial logging in old-growth and mature forests of Montana.

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