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Vol. 4, Issue 10 January 19th, 2026



## The Valley Voice – Belt Government

**Schools** By Taylee Fox, *The Valley Voice*: January 16, 2026 - Belt, Mt



Photo credit Belt School Yearbook Staff

The little town of Belt just recently got a new town clerk and mayor. This is a significant change for all the people. The new clerk, Kellen Kirby, replaced Lynn Shilling as clerk/treasurer, and the new mayor, Travis Page, took over the spot held by Jim Olson.

Kirby is originally from Stanford, Montana. He grew up on a small ranch there and graduated from Stanford High School in 2004. He was born into the family of Mike and Mary Kirby, who still live in Stanford. After graduating High School,

he went to the University of Montana Western. There, he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and Health/Fitness Management in 2008. After college, he worked in the child mental health field with Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch, AWARE, and Youth Dynamics.

His experience was broadened when he decided it was time for a change; in 2019, he switched gears and started working in the

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Badlands Tops Great Falls, 5-2 in South Dakota

**Sports** By Kevin Scott: January 16, 2026 - Rapid City, SD

Tonight's opponent for the Great Falls Americans (21-11-1-1) was the Badlands Sabres (16-12-2-2), an NA3HL squad based out of Rapid City, South Dakota.

The Americans have bested their South Dakota counterparts in two of their three contests leading up to Friday's tilt at the Roosevelt Park Ice Arena. The Sabres defeated Great Falls 2-0, but Great Falls was able to get revenge and defeat them, 4-3 in a shootout in September in Great Falls. On October 17th, they played the first game of their road trip versus the Sabres in South Dakota by posting a 6-2 win in the first leg of the trip

that finished in Gillette, Wyoming, on October 18th, where they challenged the Gillette Wild.

The Americans duo of Cooper Clouse and Ethan Miller have combined for 40 goals and 67 assists through 34 games this season for head coach Greg Sears' second-place team in the Frontier Division.

Iowa natives Dayton Niedert, playing in his first season with the Sabres, leads Brooks Mitzel's team with 23 goals and 37 total points. Maddox Harn, another Iowa product, has assisted on 22 successful scoring drives.

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Photo credit Michael Noel Photography



**Your source for local news and information**

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Great Falls Gazette  
(Print ISSN: 2993-6950, Online  
ISSN: 2993-6969) is publishing  
semi-weekly by Foxys Publishing  
Co, 1601 2nd Ave N, Suite 345,  
Great Falls, MT 59401. Application  
to Mail at Periodicals Prices is  
Pending at Great Falls, MT.  
POSTMASTER Send address  
changes to Great Falls Gazette,  
1601 2nd Ave N, Suite 345, Great  
Falls, MT 59401-3288



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## City

### NorthWestern Energy to Host 2026 Integrated Resource Plan Meeting in Great Falls

By Jo Dee Black, NorthWestern Energy: January 16, 2026 - Great Falls, Mt



**Delivering a Bright Future**

NorthWestern Energy invites customers, community members, and stakeholders to attend a public meeting on the draft 2026 Integrated Resource Plan (IRP). The meeting will be held at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 27, at the Great Falls Public Library, 301 2nd Ave. N.

The draft IRP, a list of public meetings, an informational video, and more available online at: [NorthWesternEnergy.com/IRPMeetings](http://NorthWesternEnergy.com/IRPMeetings)

The IRP is a long-term planning study that evaluates how NorthWestern Energy can meet Montana customers' electricity needs over the next 20 years under a variety of future scenarios, while balancing reliability, affordability, and risk. It provides a transparent analysis of potential scenarios to guide future decisions.

What the IRP examines:

Forecasts of future customer demand (including population growth, energy efficiency, and net metering)

Existing generation and transmission resources

Potential capacity options

Cost, reliability, and risk trade-offs across multiple future scenarios

Goal: Identify the most cost-effective capacity to meet reliability needs while managing risk and cost for Montana customers.

The IRP is not a construction plan or a final decision document.

The meeting will include a 20-minute presentation followed by time for public comments on the draft IRP.

Learn how NorthWestern Energy plans to meet Montana's future energy needs and how reliability and cost are evaluated.

Submit comments via the online form or email [IRP@northwestern.com](mailto:IRP@northwestern.com).

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# Schools

## Belt Government (Continued from page 1)

business office of Pioneer Medical Center in Big Timber. He was performing duties in accounts receivable when in this position. He then decided that he wanted to be closer to home, so he moved to Fort Benton and took a job at Big Sandy Medical Center. During this job, he was also working in the business office with Accounts Receivable. At the start of 2023, Kirby started working for Deffinbaugh Financial Services in Great Falls. During this time, Kirby also achieved his goal of becoming a licensed EMT.

Kirby found out about this job after working a day of cows while visiting his parents. His mom came across the advertisement for the clerk/treasurer position. Later in the evening, when he returned home, he decided to take the chance and put his name in for the position. Kirby decided to do this because he felt that his college degree and past work experience prepared him for the challenges he would be facing. Kirby's first day in office was November 3rd, 2025.

He added, "I really enjoy this community. The people of Belt have all been super nice and supportive, some of them I have known for many years, and others I am just meeting for the first time." Kirby says that there are some challenges that come along with the job, but he is learning the new position and feels that he is slowly becoming acclimated and figuring things out nicely. Kirby added that "the greatest challenges this job brings for me are just learning everything and where everything is, then changing things around to better fit the way I do things. Trying to find that perfect balance between the way things were done before and the way things are going to be done."

The City of Belt website: cityofbelt.org is up and running, and Kirby will be posting updates and information on it. Kirby said, "I look forward to continuing to meet the citizens of Belt and work with the new mayor, Page, and continue to work with the amazing council members."

The borders for the three wards are: Ward One is City Hall Side of the creek, north side of Bridge St. is Ward Two, and Ward Three is everything else on the east side of the creek. Each ward has two aldermen who are assigned to speak for it.

The two aldermen for Ward One are Michelle Stinson and April Wells. The representatives for Ward Two are Robert Miller and Becky Gorton. Paul Heikkila and Corbin Keaster speak for residents of Ward Three.

The council meetings are open to the public and take place every first and third Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m.; residents of the valley are encouraged to join in and take an active role in local democracy. The City Hall is now open Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

The new mayor, Page, was born and raised outside of Corvallis, Oregon. At a young age, he was

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# Sports

## Badlands Tops Great Falls (Continued from page 1)

Great Falls is battling the Helena Bighorns for the second and third spots in the Frontier Division standings, with one point (45-44) separating these two Montana rivals.

Cole Schneider scored two goals and was one of four players from the Badlands Sabres to record goals as the host team topped the Great Falls Americans, 5-2, inside the Roosevelt Park Ice Arena during Friday's junior hockey action in Rapid City, South Dakota. Ethan Miller (first period) and Jaxen Savage (third period) provided the goals for Great Falls.

Each team has now won two of the four meetings between these two opponents, with one remaining on Saturday night.

After Cooper Clouse's feed to Ethan Miller 18 seconds into the first period to give the visiting team from Montana the early 1-0 lead, the Sabres responded with two goals during the final seven minutes of the first period. Rhylan Olson evened the game with 7:17 left with assistance from Dayton Niedert and Patrick Gosselin. With the Americans in the penalty box, Cole Schneider tacked on his fourth goal of the season, which was set up by Justin Reams and Maddox Harn. The Sabres held the Americans to nine shots during the first twenty minutes while the home team attempted 19.

Badlands led 2-1 throughout the first 15 minutes of the middle stanza until Ethan Seanor took advantage of the Americans defense to record his third goal. Dayton Niedert received his second assist of the night on the only score in the second frame by either squad.

After the second intermission, Jaxen Savage utilized his offensive skills to deliver the Americans second goal to cut their deficit to 3-2. Tallon Caron earned the assist. A penalty by Great Falls cost the visitors two goals over the final two minutes. Carter Kilen gave the South Dakota NA3HL franchise a two-goal advantage with assists going to Patrick Gosselin and Sawyer Vann. Americans starting goaltender Kaden Rhyder came out of the game to give the American offense an extra player but Sabres standout Cole Schneider buried the puck in the empty net with 52 seconds left on the clock. The fifth goal was made possible by Kyran Jahner and Justin Reams.

The Sabres offense controlled the puck, creating at least 15 shots throughout each period to finish with 50. The Americans combined for 18 shots during the first and second periods and 12 in the final frame.

Cole Schneider, one of five players from North Dakota on the Badlands roster, accounted for two of his

team's power play chances. Five Great Falls power plays went unanswered.

Badlands netminder Jackson Roethler improved to 7-7-2-1 on the season by redirecting 28 of the 30 shots as he won his second game versus Great Falls. Kaden Rhyder (10-5-0-1) of the Americans had an off night as he allowed four goals while collecting 46 saves.



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## Living

### PAW'S CORNER



DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My 1-year-old puppy, "Duke," is super-active and loves the snow. Just walking him around the block isn't enough to dispel his energy, so I'd like to take him on a hike each week. Do you think he's ready for it at this age? -- Billy in Claremont, New Hampshire

DEAR BILLY: At a year old, Duke is ready for short hikes. Depending on his breed, size and tolerance for cold, he may be able to handle longer periods, but you'll need to evaluate that by taking him out for gradually longer hikes.

As with any winter hike, whether with dogs or alone, safety and awareness are paramount. Duke needs cold-weather gear, paw protection, and food and water to keep him energized and producing his own heat. Here are a few tips.

-- Start small: Keep the first hikes short, less than a mile out and back. Gradually increase the distance. Turn around if Duke starts hesitating, whining or shivering.

-- Be prepared: Pack separate food, water, pickup bags and first aid for your dog. Make sure Duke wears a collar with his ID tags attached.

-- Communicate: Tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back.

-- Check conditions first: Check the weather, but also contact the park or message a local hiking group to find out what shape the trail is in.

-- Follow park regulations: Review rules for hiking with pets on state or federal lands.

-- Don't push the limits: Turn back well before your dog (or you) starts to get cold or exhausted. Avoid potential dangers like frozen lakes or avalanche zones.

After the hike, before driving home, dry your dog's coat and check his paws for packed snow or frostbite. Put a warm doggy sweater on him for the ride home.

Send your tips, comments or questions to [ask@pawscorner.com](mailto:ask@pawscorner.com).

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# Obituaries

## Obituary of Agnes Wermling

Agnes Shirley Wermling, aged 86, passed away peacefully on Sunday, January 4, 2026, at Peace Hospice House of Great Falls, Montana. Shirley was born on June 12, 1939, to Agnes Emmabell Eller and William Wilbur Howse. She was raised in Great Falls with her five siblings, Eva (Cliff) Goodau, Roberta (Earl) Williams, Billee (Ray) Williams, Allen (Barb) Howse, and Richard (Patty) Howse.



Shirley worked in her parent's chili parlor where she met the love of her life, George Wermling. They

married on August 1, 1954. They built their life together in Great Falls, having four children, Sherry, Richard, Mark, and Shelly. Shirley enjoyed traveling but was always happy to get back home.

Her family was her pride and joy as she spent many years caring for her children and grandchildren. She once told a story as to why her children were spread out in age, stating when one child went to school, she always had another one at home with her. As the children grew, she never lost her caregiving nature. She had a green thumb and always had flowers or a plant around. For several years she worked at the Montana State Fair in the gardening and crops department as an assistant superintendent. She was a jack of all trades and was very talented in everything she did. Her hobbies included wood carving, sewing, upholstering cars, stained glass, ceramics, crocheting doilies, and cutting sapphires. She loved to watch "Days of Our Lives" and on occasion have a "hotty toddy for the body."

She is preceded in death by her parents; siblings, Eva, Roberta, Allen, and Richard; and spouse, George Wermling.

She is survived by her children, Sherry (Tom) Morgan, Richard (Shirley) Wermling, Mark (Kim) Wermling, and Shelly (Chad) Euerle; grandchildren, Matt (Jillian) Wermling, Mike Wermling (Jessica Klette), Skyler Morgan, Shelby (Michael) Roberts, Alex Wermling (Cera Carriger), Melisa Morgan, Cody (Stevannie) Euerle, and Kory Wermling (Rachel Knowles); great-grandchildren, Kendall, Allison, Hadlee, Adalyn, and Hudson Wermling, Zoey, Gabrielle, and Aspen Roberts, Daniel and Patrick Damon, Zaylia and Kinley Priete, Jaidyn and Aurora Mell, Lizzie and Cambri Euerle; her sister, Billee; as well as many nieces and nephews.

You're the "wind beneath my wings."

A celebration of life will take place on her birthday, June 12, 2026, at 2:00 p.m.

If anyone wishes, please donate to the Alzheimer's Association in lieu of flowers.

Condolences for the family may be left [www.SchniderFuneralHome.com](http://www.SchniderFuneralHome.com) online at



**Obituary and death notices are a difficult fact of life. They are a reminder of those we have loved and lost. The Great Falls Gazette does not require payment for submission of local obituaries or death notices, however, you are welcome to donate to our many programs to help people in our community to receive newspapers that they can enjoy. To submit an obituary or death notice, email them to [info@gfgazette.com](mailto:info@gfgazette.com) or call us at (406) 952-3021**



## Obituary of Anna Olson

Anna came to live at Quality Life Concepts Cedar group home in July of 1994, where she built long lasting friendships with her fellow housemates. She attended day services at Easter Seals. Anna was from Valier Montana and grew up on the family farm. Anna enjoyed being outside on a warm day and liked playing in the water. She enjoyed her coffee, hot or cold, didn't matter. Anna always found a way to communicate her needs and wants, especially if it was sweets, she would empty the cabinet to find what she was looking for if staff didn't help quick enough. She enjoyed eating, and

her favorite food was canned sardines and smoked oysters, not something she had to worry about somebody else wanting some of, she was always so excited about getting a can of these. At her day program she enjoyed exploring and building her blocks, being blind didn't slow her down. She was clever, tough, very independent and always learned how to manage her environment because she wasn't going to let things slow her down. She was loved by her family and friends, she took a piece of our hearts with her and she will be missed.



## Obituary of Ann Jergenson

Ann (Hinderager) Jergenson was welcomed into the arms of her Savior on January 7, 2026, at the age of 78 in Great Falls, MT.

Ann was born in Great Falls, MT to Carl B. and Leone J. (Scott) Hinderager on September 7, 1947. She graduated from Power High School in 1966 and married Richard H. Jergenson on February 11, 1967.



Ann spent her life dedicated to the raising of her family and continued care of her parents, children, grandchildren, and extended family. She enjoyed flower gardening, reading, and babysitting her grandchildren. Ann was a great cook and feeding people was her life's passion. If you walked into her kitchen, you could expect to be fed. She loved nature and enjoyed trips to the mountains, especially the Gibson Dam area. Her front flower garden was a birds' paradise, and she loved watching all the different birds at the feeder and bath through her kitchen window.

Ann is preceded in death by her parents, Carl and Leone Hinderager, her baby sister Karen Hinderager, her twin brother Ted Hinderager, and great nephew Lane Hinderager.

Ann is survived by her husband, Richard H. Jergenson of Vaughn; her children Lucia (Travis) Dirkes of Nampa, ID, Douglas (Kim) Jergenson of Fort Shaw, and Timothy (Brandi) Jergenson of Vaughn; brothers Scott (Sally) Hinderager of Fort Shaw, Carl

(Della) Hinderager of Caronport, SK, Canada, Paul (Berva) Hinderager of Vaughn, and Max (Carla) Hinderager of Lewistown; grandchildren Lane, Savannah, Jarrett, Bridger, and Weston Dirkes of Nampa, ID, Caleb (Naemi) Jergenson of Vaughn, Sophie (Andrew) Gannon of Mabton, WA, and Macie and Darla Jergenson of Vaughn; great grandchildren Kallie, Brielle, and Evelyn Ann Jergenson of Vaughn, and Remington Gannon of Mabton, WA; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Cremation has taken place. A memorial service is planned at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, January 24, 2026, at Croxford Funeral Home. A lunch reception will follow.

The family would like to extend our gratitude to the staff of Stillwater Hospice and the Bee Hive's Maple House memory care in Great Falls for their care and support the past 9 months.



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# Local Weather For Great Falls

NWS Forecast for: Cascade County below 5000ft  
Issued by: National Weather Service Great Falls, MT  
Last Update: [12:39 pm MST Jan 18, 2026]

**M.L.King Day** Increasing clouds, with a high near 44. West southwest wind 7 to 11 mph, with gusts as high as 21 mph.

**Monday Night** Mostly cloudy, with a low around 27. Southwest wind around 10 mph.

**Tuesday** A 40 percent chance of snow before 11am. Cloudy through mid morning, then gradual clearing, with a high near 37. Northwest wind 9 to 13 mph, with gusts as high as 23 mph. New snow accumulation of less than a half inch possible.

**Tuesday Night** Partly cloudy, with a low around 19. West southwest wind 6 to 9 mph becoming north northwest after midnight.

**Wednesday** Mostly sunny, with a high near 34. North northwest wind around 7 mph becoming west southwest in the afternoon.

**Wednesday Night** Partly cloudy, with a low around 20. South southwest wind around 6 mph.

**Keep an eye on the weather all week long, you can get a monthly subscription to Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday of the Gazette for about the price of three large lattes!**



**Happy 89th Birthday, Mr Larry Ginnaty!  
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a day filled with love, laughter, and all the  
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## Belt Government (Continued from page 2)

introduced to amateur (Ham) Radio, and that has been a huge part of his life for over 30 years. When he was a teenager, Page wasn't interested in playing video games or participating in teenage activities. Page was busy making contacts all over the world on the radio. He currently has a very big station at his house and in his pickup. Page also likes to contribute his time to a few Ham Radio clubs around the states of Montana, Washington, and Oregon.

Page stated, "There are a handful of us Hams who have created a small gathering in Belt every year, people come from all over the country, we call it Belt-fest." Page also stated that if anyone has any questions about Ham Radio, he is willing to teach and answer questions.

His family is small but tight-knit. His wife, Briana, son Jaxon, and father-in-law Jake all live in Belt.

Back in 2020, something was telling his family to move out of Oregon and find a new place to settle down. Page knew that at some time he would like to move to Montana. Page and his family slowly started to look for houses when they came across one in Belt, a town they had never heard of. When Page made it into Belt, he immediately knew that this is where they needed to be.

When his wife asked him how it went, he jokingly said, "I am going to be the mayor of that town one day." One day, Page found out that Olson was going to be retiring for good and decided that someone needed to take his place.

Page knew that it was going to be a challenge, but that didn't stop him. Page fell in love with the community of Belt and knew that he would be able to make the town better. Page wants to make the community of Belt better than

when he started. First, he is working on getting the water project completed.

Page explained, "The only way I am going to be successful in my position is to get community input. I really want to encourage people to come to the City Hall meetings and give public input, good, bad, or indifferent." The best way to get in contact with Mayor Page is through the City Hall or the meetings. Page is looking forward to serving his wonderful community and the awesome people of Belt.

Many people don't usually pay much attention to local government, but without these individuals, day-to-day life in Belt would not be as convenient as it is. The Voice is pleased to welcome both Kirby and Page to the community.

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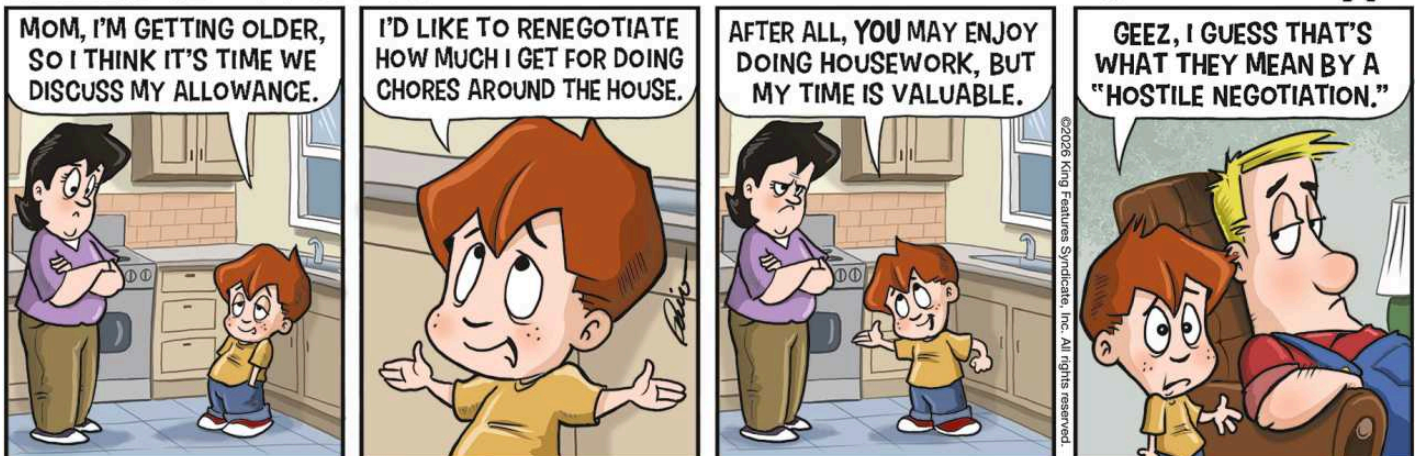
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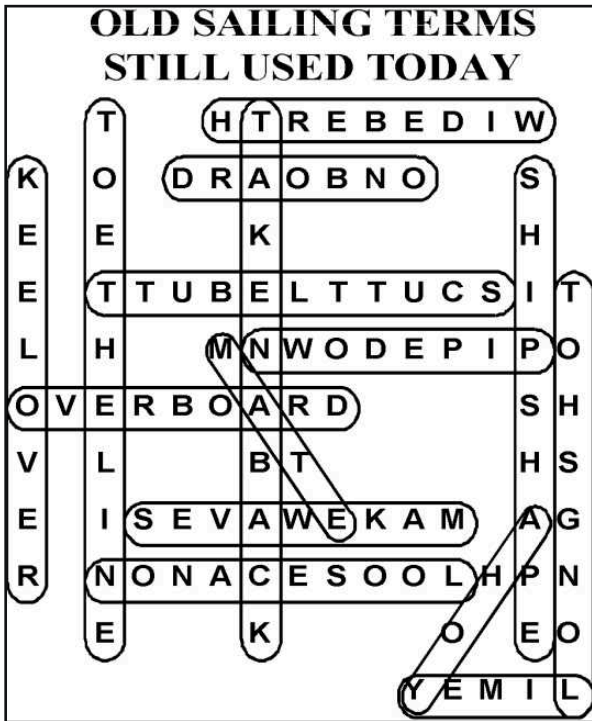
- |           |             |             |              |
|-----------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Ahoy      | Loose canon | Overboard   | Taken aback  |
| Keel over | Make waves  | Pipe down   | Toe the line |
| Limey     | Mate        | Scuttlebutt | Wide berth   |
| Long shot | Onboard     | Shipshape   |              |

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## Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





**Civilized letters to the editor may be sent to [letters@gfgazette.com](mailto:letters@gfgazette.com) or mailed to Letter To The Editor, 1601 2nd Ave N, Suite 345, Great Falls, MT 59401. Letters must include name (we print first name, last initial), hometown, and either a phone number or email address. Letters that attack others, are patently untrue, or are of a harmful nature WILL be rejected!**



# CrimeStoppers Most Wanted



Great Falls/Cascade County CrimeStoppers, the Great Falls Police Department, and the Cascade County Sheriff's Office make every effort to keep the Most Wanted list current. We cannot guarantee the currency of the information. If you have reason to believe that any of the information contained on the list is inaccurate, call the Cascade County Sheriff's Office at (406) 454-6820 Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

If you have any information to report, please call (406) 727-8477 (TIPS) or go to P3TIPS.COM (For a situation in progress, call 911). All callers remain anonymous and a reward can be paid for tips leading to an arrest. Help keep our community safe by sharing this information.



**Burchard, Cody James:** 33 yoa, white male, 5'6", 175#, brown hair, brown eyes, wanted on: 3 warrants, Violation of Bail Conditions on Burglary, felony, Criminal Mischief, misdemeanor, Fail To Obey Red (Stop) Traffic Signal, misdemeanor, Operating Without Liability Insurance In Effect, 4th or subsequent offense, misdemeanor, Driving a Motor Vehicle While Privilege To Do So Is Suspended or Revoked, 1st offense, misdemeanor, and Operating Without Liability Insurance In Effect, 1st offense, misdemeanor, Driving a Motor Vehicle While Privilege To Do So Is Suspended or Revoked, 1st offense, misdemeanor, Stop Sign Violation, misdemeanor, total bond \$16,520

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