



HARE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

## VOLUNTEERS WRANGLE RODNEY STREET RABBITS



SONNY TAPIA PHOTOS, INDEPENDENT RECORD

Lily Vickers, a freshman anthrozoology major at Carroll College who orchestrated the project, sets a trap in a homeowner's backyard on Rodney Street with a goal of catching feral rabbits on April 11.

### Carroll student-led project aims to get feral animals out of Helena neighborhood

SONNY TAPIA  
sonny.tapia@helenair.com

The occupancy of the infamous rabbits of Rodney may be coming to an end.

About a dozen volunteers spent Saturday morning chasing and catching the feral rabbits in the Rodney Street neighborhood during a student-led project for the Carroll College anthrozoology department.

The goal of Saturday's project was to just catch rabbit kits, but Carroll College freshman anthrozoology major Lily Vickers said volunteers would return later to catch adult males, then females in the area.

"The goal is to get all of these rabbits out of this area. Get them spayed, neutered, vaccinated and relocated," Vickers said. "We also want to adopt out some of the younger ones, and really, our goal is to just stop the spread of feral rabbits. But we have to start somewhere."

Vickers, who orchestrated the plan, said the reason for the roundup is because the rabbits are an invasive species that have been known to burrow into properties, eat wires out of cars and cause many other problems.

"They are not meant to live out here, so if we can get them out of here we can let the cottontails (rabbits) return to the area," she said.

Independent Record reporting last year found residents in the neighborhood carried opposing views of the rabbits. Some see them as furry friends — others as fluffy felons.

"I've been overseeing the rabbit issue for about five years now," Helena's Urban Wildlife Animal Control Officer Sean McCarthy



A feral rabbit darts alongside a garage door near Rodney Street on April 11.

said last September.

"We get calls often where homeowners express their frustration over damaged property, whether that be broken decks due to burrowed holes or gardens that are eaten," he said. "Another major concern is where rabbits go when temperatures drop. Rabbits often find shelter in car engines for warmth, which is dangerous for them and can damage the vehicles."

Saturday's operation began with a meeting of the volunteers in the Helena Middle School parking lot, where they assembled traps, cardboard carriers and gathered nets and blankets.

"There's 'TNR,' which is trap, neuter, return ... but, since Lily extensively surveyed this neighborhood, the consensus is definitely that people do not want them here — except for a handful of folks — permanently," said Carroll College Assistant Professor of Anthrozoology Margo Demello. "So, we're not doing trap, neuter, return;

Please see RABBITS, Page A2



A volunteer holds a net to the ground, blocking an exit path, as a feral rabbit sits underneath a car on April 11.

## Shinn named University of Montana president

Boise State interim leader picked to succeed Bodnar, who's running for Senate

NICOLE GIRTEN  
nicole.girten@ravallirepublic.com

MISSOULA — The Montana Board of Regents voted unanimously Tuesday morning to approve the contract for finalist candidate Jeremiah Shinn to be the University of Montana's next president.

Shinn, current interim president of Boise State University, will start at UM on July 1, according to a UM press release.

"I am honored to be named the 20th president of the University of Montana and eager to get started," Shinn in the release. "I am inspired by the remarkable students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members who make UM so special, and I look forward to joining this extraordinary team to build on its strong foundation and shape a bright future together."

Commissioner of Higher Education Clayton Christian and the presidential search advisory work group did an expedited search with a third party contractor to find the replacement for former President Seth Bodnar.

Bodnar announced in January he would be stepping down as president of UM amid rumors he was planning to run for U.S. Senate. In March, Bodnar filed as an independent in the race.

Board Chair Todd Buchanan said on Tuesday UM is growing and on a course for success, "and we did not want any vacancy in leadership to disrupt that momentum."

"This board is so confident about the student successes being presented at the University of Montana, we felt like we needed to strike fast and are excited about this process," Buchanan said.



Shinn

Please see UM PRESIDENT, Page A2

## Judges express skepticism at youth climate case appeal

ALEX MITCHELL  
amitchell@billingsgazette.com

BILLINGS — A 9th Circuit Court of Appeals three-judge panel expressed skepticism Monday toward both sides of an appealed request meant to halt some of the Trump administration's energy-related directives.

The lawsuit, *Lighthiser v. Trump*, was filed in May in U.S. District Court in Missoula on behalf of 22 people under the age of 25, most of whom are from Montana. Some of them are the same group from *Held v. Montana*, whose 2023 case reaffirmed Montanans' right to a clean and healthful environment as outlined in the state constitution. The state of Montana and 18 other states have intervened in the *Lighthiser* case to defend the U.S.'s directives.

The group, represented in part by the environmental group Our Children's Trust, told the panel that U.S. District Judge Dana Christensen erred in his October assessment. His decision concluded it wasn't in the judicial system's capacity to address the plaintiffs' concerns. Nonetheless, he still said Trump's policies will increase the harm plaintiffs experience from a warming climate in his "reluctant" decision.

At its core, the appeal asks the 9th Circuit whether the groups of young plaintiffs can assert harm inflicted by three executive orders. That means they could seek remedies, likely ending those directives. Those three executive orders included seeking to "unleash American energy" (focused mainly on fossil fuels), declaring a national energy emergency and revitalizing the

Please see CLIMATE, Page A3

# Rabbits

From AI

we're doing trap, neuter, relocate. And probably trap, neuter, contain on the new property that they are going to."

Demello has studied and written about the behavior and cultural impact of rabbits for more than 30 years. She has been the president of the House Rabbit Society, the world's first and largest rabbit protection agency, for 14 years, and has taught at Carroll for five years.

Participants split off

into multiple groups that walked around the area carrying their traps, nets and blankets, until a chase would ensue up and down streets, alleyways and into backyards.

The traps set by one group would be checked every day by a project representative to ensure the rabbit could be quickly removed from the confined space and safely transported to its next destination.

The rabbit wranglers saw some success Saturday but most evaded their nets. Still, there's hope the traps left in place will be effective.



**SONNY TAPIA, INDEPENDENT RECORD**

Dr. Margo Demello, Carroll College assistant professor in anthrozoology, waves her arms as she talks about a project where volunteers round up feral rabbits on Rodney Street in the Helena Middle School parking lot on April 11.