

Huntley-area resident finds body of Lockwood girl reported missing in canal

Mike Kordenbrock

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Chris Dover of Absaroka Search Dogs and her dog Napi walk along the bank of the Huntley Project Irrigation canal as the search continues for 12-year-old Taeva Hawkins on Wednesday.

CASEY PAGE/Gazette Staff

Mike Kordenbrock

The body of Taeva Hawkins, the 12-year-old Lockwood girl missing since Saturday, was found Thursday afternoon by a Huntley resident.

Yellowstone County Sheriff Mike Linder said he was informed of the discovery at 1:45 p.m. A resident found Hawkins' body caught on a structure in the water six miles east of where she was first reported missing Saturday.

"It's a bittersweet ending but it can bring the family some closure, I hope," Linder said.

Hawkins was reported missing Saturday at about 6 p.m. She disappeared while swimming with two older girls through a tunnel that drains into the Huntley Project Irrigation District canal. The two older girls made it through the tunnel. Hawkins did not.

A **gofundme** has been started for the family.

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About 70 people attended a candlelight vigil Tuesday night at Eileen Johnson Middle School to honor Hawkins.

"It's very comforting to know that she had this many friends," said the girl's father, Robert Nelson, who accepted hugs from his daughter's friends and their parents during Tuesday's vigil. "So many people have come out to celebrate the beauty of her life."

"My daughter's light," Nelson told the crowd Tuesday, "will never be extinguished."

Search parties worked every day, with dogs, divers and 100 people joining the effort Wednesday. On Thursday they tried a flyover search with fewer people on the ground.

Linder said the Huntley Project Irrigation District was helpful.

"They were out searching continuously," he said, adding that before Thursday's discovery, the district had volunteered to lower the canal again on Friday.

The community also played a huge role in the effort, he said, with some coming from as far away as Kalispell and others who simply showed up with food and drink for searchers.

"There's never a lack of resources in this community," Linder said. "It was a communitywide and agencywide effort, without a doubt."

Agencies and organizations including the Laurel Volunteer Fire Department, the Blue Creek Volunteer Fire Department, the Worden Fire Department, the Shepherd Volunteer Fire Department, the Billings Police Department, U.S. Water Rescue and Billings Flying Service, also helped in the search.

Photos: Search for missing Lockwood girl

The search for a 12-year-old Lockwood girl who went missing in a Huntley Irrigation District canal.



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