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DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
AND CONSERVATION



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**GROOMED CROSS-COUNTRY SKI TRAIL SYSTEM  
FINAL CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
November 22, 2005

Enclosed is a copy of the final Groomed Cross-country Ski Trail System Checklist Environmental Assessment.

The proposed project is located approximately 10 miles south of Swan Lake, Montana in the Swan River State Forest.

DNRC has chosen to implement the Action Alternative. The Action Alternative issues a non-exclusive land use license to Swan Mountain Outfitters that authorizes installation of 2 temporary warming huts, grooming, maintenance, and skier use of 7.5 miles of ski trails within the Swan River State Forest on Sections 16, 17, and 20, T24N, R17W from December 15, 2005 to March 31, 2006. The land use license should be issued in the first part of December.

Thank you for your interest concerning this project. I welcome any further thoughts and comments.

Respectfully

Daniel J. Roberson  
Unit Manager  
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58741 HWY 83 South  
Swan Lake, Montana 59911  
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## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (CEA)

<b>Project Name:</b>	<b>Groomed Cross Country Ski Trail System</b>
<b>Proposed Implementation Date:</b>	December 15, 2005 (with annual renewal)
<b>Proponent:</b>	Swan Mountain Outfitters
<b>Location:</b>	Swan River State Forest - Sections 16, 17, and 20, T24N, R17W
<b>County:</b>	LAKE

### I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

#### INTRODUCTION

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Swan River State Forest, is proposing to issue a non-exclusive Land Use License (LUL) to Swan Mountain Outfitters to allow for the operation of a warming hut and groomed cross-country ski trail system. This proposal would allow for day use by cross-country skiers that are guests of the Swan Mountain Ranch. In addition, it is expected that there will be day users from the local area as well as winter tourists staying at other facilities. The project area is within Sections 16, 17, and 20, T24N, R17W, of Swan River State Forest (see attached map). The project is located approximately 10 miles south of Swan Lake, Montana. The license would be issued in early December of 2005 for a period of 1 year with possible annual renewal.

The Land Use License would authorize installation of 2 temporary warming huts, grooming, maintenance (removal of downed material), and skier use of the identified trail system of approximately 7.5 miles within a proposed 12-foot corridor from December 15, 2005 to March 31, 2006. The proposed trail corridors lie on existing roads, skid trails, and trails. Uses of the licensed trail system during that period would remain available for general recreational use by individuals possessing a State Lands Recreational Use Permit. The area would also remain available to DNRC management activity.

#### PROJECT NEED

Lands involved in the proposed project are held by the State of Montana in trust for the support of specific beneficiary institutions. These include public schools, State colleges and universities, and other specific State institutions, such as the School for the Deaf and Blind. The Montana State Board of Land Commissioners (Land Board) and DNRC are required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run for these beneficiary institutions, (*Section 77-1-202, Montana Codes Annotated [MCA]*).

#### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Generate revenue for the school trusts while allowing for the operation of a warming hut and groomed cross-country ski trail system on a portion of Swan River State Forest.
- Oversee and provide guidance to the Licensee concerning day use on groomed ski trails within State lands.

### II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

#### 1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

*Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.*

The initial scoping included a project information sheet and map composed by Dan Roberson, Swan River State Forest Unit Manager. The scoping notice was mailed on September 29, 2005 to adjacent landowners, various Agency resource specialists and representatives, and Friends of the Wild Swan. Comments concerning the proposed project were accepted until October 21, 2005. From this scoping, 3 comments were received: Connie

Kay, resident of Swan Lake; Cindy Love, resident of Swan Lake, and Arlene Montgomery, Friends of the Wild Swan. All favored the proposed project. Friends of the Wild Swan had concerns that wildlife security be maintained through effective use of road closures. This concern will be addressed in this document.

## **2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:**

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (DFWP) has jurisdiction over the management of fisheries and wildlife populations in the project area. DFWP is on the mailing list and has received the scoping letter.

DNRC is a member of the Montana Airshed Group, which regulates slash burning through air-quality and weather monitoring on State trust lands. DNRC receives an air-quality permit for burning slash through participation in this group.

The Swan Valley Grizzly Bear Conservation Agreement (SVGBCA), a cooperative agreement between DNRC, PCTC, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and United States Forest Service (USFS), is currently in effect. This project will define mitigation measures for operating within the SVGBCA parameters.

## **3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:**

An Action Alternative and a No-Action Alternative were considered for this project.

### ***No-Action Alternative***

- DNRC would not issue a non-exclusive LUL to Swan Mountain Outfitters to develop and maintain a groomed cross-country ski trail system.
- There would be no opportunity to generate revenue for the school trust through issuance of a LUL to Swan Mountain Outfitters to allow for the operation of a warming hut and groomed cross-country ski trail system.
- General recreational use would continue in the area.
- When funding is available and equipment is in the area, roads and closures would be maintained.
- Wildfire suppression efforts, when applicable, would continue.
- Efforts to control the spread of noxious weeds would continue.
- Future actions, including timber harvesting, may be proposed and go through the appropriate environmental analysis.

### ***Action Alternative***

- DNRC would enter into a non-exclusive LUL with Swan Mountain Outfitters that authorizes use of a groomed cross-country ski trail system between December 15, 2005 and March 31, 2006. The LUL may be renewed annually.
- The LUL would authorize pre-season trail maintenance activities and the installation and removal of 2 temporary warming huts.
- The ski trail system would be established in a 12-foot corridor along approximately 7.5 miles of existing roads, skid trails, and trails.
- The LUL would generate revenue for the school trust.
- General recreational use would continue in the area.
- When funding is available and equipment is in the area, roads and closures would be maintained.
- Wildfire suppression efforts, when applicable, would continue.
- Efforts to control the spread of noxious weeds would continue.
- Future actions, including timber harvesting, may be proposed and go through the appropriate environmental analysis.

### III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES* potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.
- Explain **POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS** following each resource heading.
- Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

#### 4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

*Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.*

#### NONE

The proposal involves grooming on top of the snow within existing road prisms, skid trails, and trails between December 15<sup>th</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup>. Pre-season (June 16<sup>th</sup> through August 31<sup>st</sup>) maintenance activities may include some removal of downed logs in trail corridors and installation and removal of 2 temporary warming huts. Maintenance activities are not anticipated to exceed 3 days. Existing roads would only be used when they are dry. No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be expected if each alternative were implemented.

#### 5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

*Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.*

#### NONE

The proposed groomed ski trails are adjacent to or cross 1 intermittent and 2 perennial streams that are tributary to Cilly Creek. All stream crossing sites are corrugated metal pipes (CMPs). The crossing sites pre-exist and are well vegetated. All ski trails are well vegetated. The proposed action would not disturb existing road and trail vegetation. No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be expected if each alternative were implemented.

#### 6. AIR QUALITY:

*What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.*

#### NONE

The project is within Montana Airshed 2 and is not within a Class 1 Airshed. Air quality within this airshed is considered good. Temporary local reductions in air quality currently occur from wildfires, prescribed broadcast burning, slash burning, and road dust. No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be expected if each alternative were implemented.

#### 7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

*What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.*

#### NONE

Approximately 7.5 miles of existing road, skid trails, and trails would be used for the trail system. Some trimming of branches and removal of downed logs within the corridor width is proposed. Proposed activity is not anticipated to disturb surface vegetation or increase risk of noxious weed establishment. Some downed firewood would be gathered for the warming huts. There are no known rare plants or cover types present near the proposed trail system. No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be expected if each alternative were implemented.

**8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:**

*Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.*

**NONE**

A wide range of fish, birds, and wildlife species inhabit the Swan Valley and the project area, including bull trout, grizzly bears, and big game species. All of the roads within the project area are presently closed year round to motorized traffic. The area does receive occasional administrative motorized use. The proposed project would generate 1 to 3 motorized trips during the summer period (June 16<sup>th</sup> through August 31<sup>st</sup>) or after November 16<sup>th</sup> (start of denning season as defined by the SVGBCA) for trail maintenance and possible placement of temporary warming huts. Trail use and grooming would occur between December 15<sup>th</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup>

Warming huts will be wall tents and would only be furnished with wood-burning stoves and sitting chairs. No food, garbage, or other amenities will be keep on site that may act as attractants for wildlife.

No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be expected if each alternative were implemented

**9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:**

*Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.*

**NONE**

Threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and habitats are contained within the project area. The project area is within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem Grizzly Bear recovery area. Activity related to the proposed action would be conducted in accordance with the SVGBCA (*USFWS and others, 1997*). No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be expected if each alternative were implemented.

**10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:**

*Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.*

**NONE**

No historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources have been found in the project area. No such sites or features were noted during the field review of this project.

**11. AESTHETICS:**

*Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.*

**NONE**

No change in existing vegetation or traditional use of the area is anticipated with this proposal. No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be expected if each alternative were implemented.

**12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:**

*Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.*

**NONE**

No impact to demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy is anticipated as a result of this proposal.

**13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:**

*List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.*

In relation to grizzly bears, effects of management activities were analyzed in the EA and Biological Opinion for the SVGBCA (USFWS, 1995a and 1995b). Activities related to the proposed alternative would be conducted in accordance with this agreement (USFWS et al, 1997).

The State Forest Land Management Plan (SFLMP) was adopted by DNRC in June of 1996. The Plan directs management activities on School Trust lands. Prior to implementing the plan, a programmatic environmental impact statement was completed. Swan River State Forest falls under the guidance and standards of the SFLMP, which establishes thresholds that account for cumulative effects. Activities related to the proposed alternative would be conducted in accordance with the SFLMP

**IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION**

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

**14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:**

*Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.*

**NONE**

**15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:**

*Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.*

**NONE**

The non-exclusive license would be issued on an annual basis. Traditional management activities would continue in the area. No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be expected if each alternative were implemented.

**16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:**

*Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.*

**NONE**

Due to the relatively small size of this project, the proposed action would result in no substantial changes to local employment, but would provide continued opportunities in the natural-resource industry.

**17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:**

*Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.*

**NONE**

No impact to local and state tax base and tax revenues is anticipated as a result of this proposal.

**18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:**

*Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services*

**NONE**

No impact to demand for government services is anticipated as a result of this proposal.

**19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:**

*List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans. and identify how they would affect this project.*

The proposal is consistent with the SFLMP and associated implementation Forest Management Rules (ARM 36.11.401 through 450) adopted in March of 2003. Applicable Rules have been incorporated into the design of the proposed action.

**20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:**

*Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.*

**NONE**

The proposed ski trail area is primarily used for hunting, hiking, snowmobiling, and berry picking. It receives light to moderate general recreational use throughout the year. The LUL issued would be non-exclusive. Traditional general recreational use of the trail area would not be excluded. No measurable direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be expected if each alternative were implemented.

**21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:**

*Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.*

**NONE**

No impact to density and distribution of population and housing is anticipated as a result of this proposal

**22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:**

*Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.*

**NONE**

No impact to social structures and mores is anticipated as a result of this proposal. The proposed project would provide 7.5 miles of groomed cross-country ski trails in an area that is already used by cross country skiers and other winter sports recreationists.

**23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:**

*How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?*

**NONE**

No impact to cultural uniqueness and diversity is anticipated as a result of this proposal.

**24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:**

*Estimate the return to the Trust Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.*

**DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS**

• ***NO-ACTION/ALTERNATIVE***

Since no direct economic activity is associated with the No-Action Alternative, no effect on local employment, wages, or trust income would be expected.

• ***ACTION/ALTERNATIVE***

The non-exclusive license fee is calculated based on a land use fee in addition to a fee per user in lieu of the traditional recreational use license. Depending on the number of users the estimated fee for one season will be approximately \$250 to \$800. This fee would be distributed to the trust beneficiaries.

It is anticipated that maintenance and grooming of the ski trails and warming huts would generate one part time job. Trail users from outside the valley may contribute income to the local economy by using local restaurants, motels, and lodges.

**CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

• ***NO-ACTION/ACTION/ALTERNATIVES***

Since no direct economic activity is associated with the No-Action Alternative, no effect on local employment, wages, or trust income would be expected.

• ***ACTION/ALTERNATIVE***

The LUL would be made available for annual renewal that would provide \$250 to \$800 of annual income to Trust beneficiaries.

<b>EA Checklist Prepared By:</b>	<b>Name:</b> Dan Roberson	<b>Date:</b> 11/10/05
	<b>Title:</b> Swan Unit Manager	

## V. FINDING

### 25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Two alternatives are presented and fully analyzed in the CEA:

- No Action Alternative - includes existing activities, but does not include a non-exclusive LUL to Swan Mountain Outfitters to allow for the operation of a warming hut and groomed cross-country ski trail system..
- In addition to existing activities, the Action Alternative proposes preparing and issuing non-exclusive LUL to Swan Mountain Outfitters to allow for the operation of a warming hut and groomed cross-country ski trail system.

I have reviewed the correspondence from the public and information presented in the CEA. For the following reasons, I have selected the Action Alternative without additional modifications:

- The selected Action Alternative meets the goals and objectives listed in the checklist.
- The analysis of identified issues did not reveal information to persuade DNRC or myself to choose the No-Action Alternative.
- The proposal is consistent with the SFLMP and associated implementation Forest Management Rules (*ARM 36.11.401 through 450*) adopted in March of 2003. Applicable Rules have been incorporated into the design of the proposed action.
- Realizes opportunity to generate revenue for the school trust fund.
- Allows for creation of an outdoor recreation opportunity within the Swan Valley.
- Allows for authorized compatible use on classified forest (timber management) lands.

### 26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I find that the Action Alternative will not have significant impacts on the human environment for the following reasons:

- The proposed LUL and its accompanying activity conforms to the management philosophies of DNRC and is in compliance with existing laws, rules, policies, and standards applicable to this type of proposed action.
- The Action Alternative will not preclude analysis of future actions on State Land.
- Mitigations and specifications identified within the CEA will be implemented as prescribed.
- The proposed activities are similar to past projects on State lands using common recreational use practices, and they are not being conducted on unique or fragile sites.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

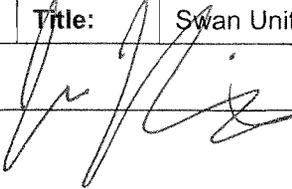
Based on the following, I find that a more detailed EA or an EIS does not need to be prepared:

- The CEA adequately addressed the issues identified during project development and displayed the information needed to make the decisions.
- Evaluation of the potential impacts of the proposed non-exclusive LUL to Swan Mountain Outfitters to allow for the operation of a warming hut and groomed cross-country ski trail system indicates that no significant impacts would occur.
- The ID Team provided adequate opportunities for public review and comment. Public concerns were incorporated into the project design and analysis of impacts as displayed in the CEA.

EIS

More Detailed EA

No Further Analysis

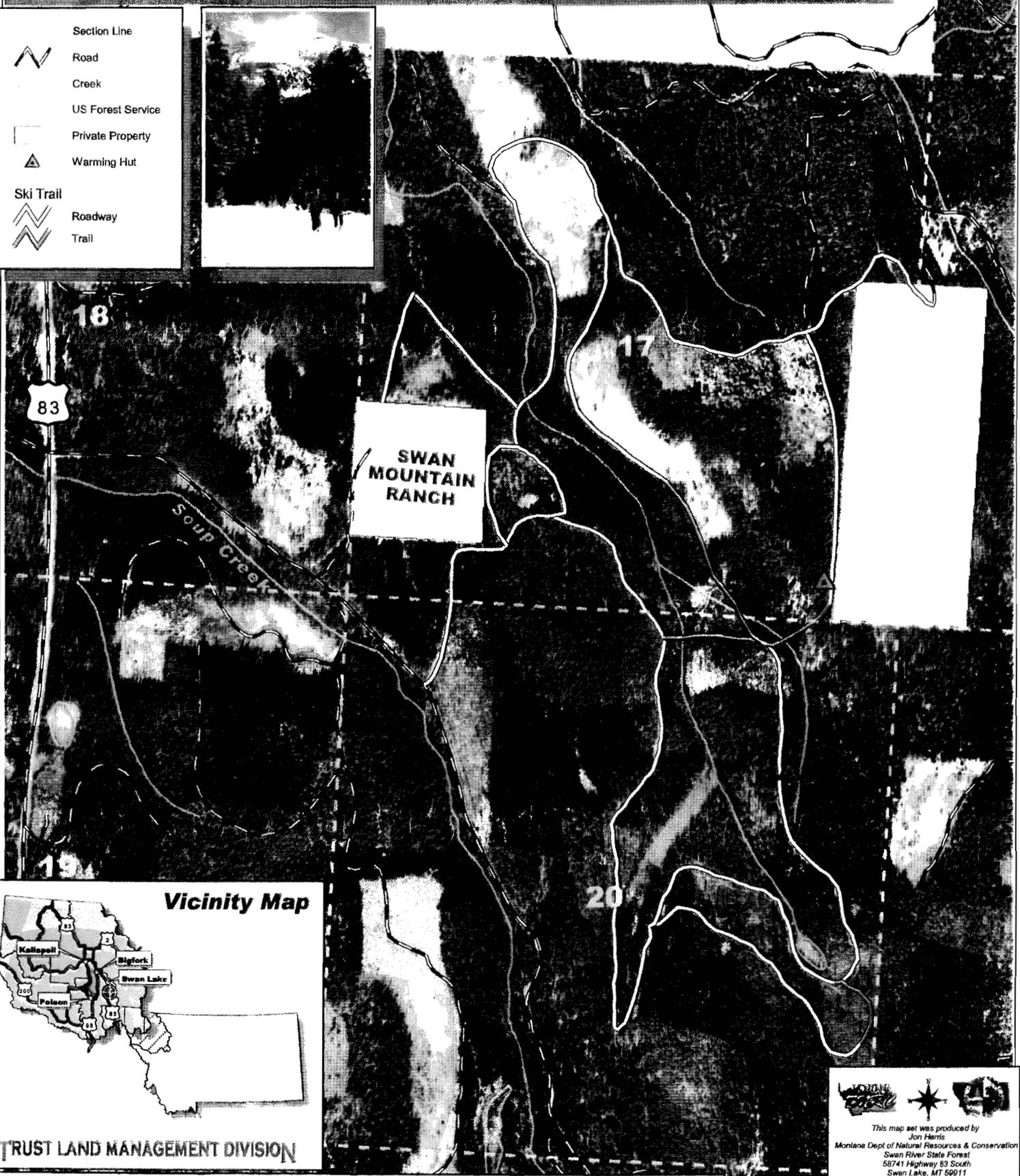
<b>EA Checklist Approved By:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	Jon Harris		
	<b>Title:</b>	Swan Unit Forest Management Supervisor		
<b>Signature:</b>			<b>Date:</b>	11/10/05

# Proposed Cross-Country Ski Trails

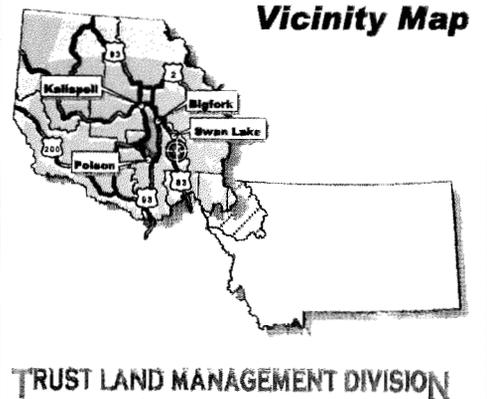
Township 24 North - Range 17 West



-  Section Line
-  Road
-  Creek
-  US Forest Service
-  Private Property
-  Warming Hut
- Ski Trail**
-  Roadway
-  Trail



**Vicinity Map**



TRUST LAND MANAGEMENT DIVISION



  
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