Region One
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 752-5501
Fax: 406-257-0349
Ref: JS061-10
October 19, 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), Region One, proposes to reintroduce mountain goats to the Whitefish Range of northwest Montana. We propose to move approximately 15 mountain goats from the Crazy Mountains near Big Timber, with work beginning as early as January 2011. The goats would be released on Stryker Peak near the town of Stryker. A copy of the draft environmental assessment (EA) is enclosed.

The draft EA is out for a 15-day public review through 5:00 p.m.,Wednesday, November 3, 2010. Please contact FWP Area Wildlife Biologist Tim Thier at (406) 882-4697 or e-mail to tthier@mt.gov with questions or comments.

Sincerely,

James R. Satterfield, Jr.

James R. Satterfield Jr., Ph.D.
Regional Supervisor

/ni
Enclosure
c: *Governor's Office, Attn: Mike Volesky, PO Box 200801, Helena, 59620-0801
*Environmental Quality Council, PO Box 20, Helena, 59620-1704
*Dept. of Environmental Quality, Planning, Prevention & Assistance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
*Dept. of Environmental Quality, Permitting Compliance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
*Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Director's Office – Reg Peterson; Legal Unit – Stella Cureton; Fisheries – Wildlife – Steve Knapp; Rebecca Cooper & Candace Durran
*DNRC, PO Box 201601, Helena, 59620-1601 (Patty Greene)
*Montana Historical Society, SHPO, 225 North Roberts, Veteran's Memorial Building, Helena, 59620-1201
*Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800
*Adam McLane, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624
*George Ochenski, 4 Harrison Avenue, Helena, MT 59601
*Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation, PO Box 728, Libby, 59923
*Montana State Parks Association, PO Box 699, Billings, 59103
*Joe Gutkoski, President, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, 59715
*Senator Aubyn Curtiss, PO Box 216, Fortine, MT 59918
*Representatives Chas Vincent, 5957 Champion Road, Libby, MT 59923 & Gerald Bennett, 784 Taylor Road, Libby, MT 59923
*Lincoln County Commissioners, 512 California Avenue, Libby, MT 59923
Lincoln County Libraries: 220 W 6th Street, Libby; 318 Dewey Avenue, Eureka; and 207 N 3rd, Troy, MT
Interested Parties

*E-mailed

Draft
Environmental Assessment

Reintroduction of Mountain Goats to the Whitefish Range of Northwest Montana

October 2010

Prepared by:
Tim Thier, FWP Area Biologist

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Draft Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to reintroduce mountain goats (Oreamnos americanus) to the Whitefish Range of northwest Montana. We propose to move approximately 15 mountain goats from the Crazy Mountains near Big Timber, with work beginning as early as January 2011. The goats would be released on Stryker Peak near the town of Stryker. Mountain goats occurred in the Whitefish Range historically, but were largely extirpated by the 1960s. Occasional, reliable reports persisted into the 1990s. These sightings could probably be attributed to individuals that had migrated considerable distances from Canada or Glacier National Park. No mountain goats are known to occur in the Whitefish Range south of the Canadian border at this time.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

3. Name of project:

Reintroduction of Mountain Goats to the Whitefish Range of Northwest Montana

4. Anticipated schedule:
Estimated commencement date: January 2011
Estimated completion date: Because of logistics, it may take 3-4 years.
Current status of project design (% complete): n/a

5. Location of project:

Goats would be released in Lincoln County on Stryker Peak, approximately 3 miles east of the town of Stryker, on land managed by DNRC (Sec. 29, T34N, R24W), with goats eventually dispersing into the Whitefish Range from there.

6. Project size - estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	0
Residential	0		
Industrial (existing shop area)	0	(e) Productive:	
		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	0	Dry cropland	0
		Forestry	0
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	0	Rangeland	0
		Other	0

7. Listing of any other local, state, or federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction:

(a) Permits (Permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.):

Agency Name	Permits

(b) Funding:

Agency Name	Funding Amount

(c) Other overlapping or additional jurisdictional responsibilities:

Agency Name	Type of Responsibility
Montana DNRC	Vehicle Access

8. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project, including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

FWP is seeking to relocate approximately 15 mountain goats from the Crazy Mountains near Big Timber to Stryker Peak in the Whitefish Range for the purpose of establishing a new population of mountain goats in northwest Montana. It is hoped that with time, a herd of at least 75 animals will become established in the Whitefish Range.

Goats would be captured via helicopter in the Crazy Mountains during the winter months and individually marked with ear tags, with several receiving radio-transmitters. Each animal would be physically examined, with blood and other samples taken to accurately assess physical condition. They would then be placed in individual transport crates, which would then be loaded into horse trailers for transport to Stryker. Upon arrival east of Stryker and dependent upon snow conditions, they would then be loaded onto sleds and transported via snowmobile a short distance to the base of Stryker Peak. Efforts would be made to release the goats from the transport cages simultaneously so they will move uphill toward the upper portions of the ridge.

Evidence suggests that mountain goats wintered on Stryker Peak historically, and that the ridge currently constitutes some of the best winter habitat for goats in the Whitefish Range. Once established on Stryker Peak, it is hoped that goat populations will expand and eventually disperse to the east and into the heart of the Whitefish Range. Although winter transplants of goats may be more logistically difficult than summer releases, evidence indicates they are usually more successful. There is less heat stress on the animals, and they are less likely to disperse immediately upon release due to the presence of snow. A greater affinity to the release site is developed, as is a greater social bonding of the released animals.

In the event that a decision is made to “undo” the release due to a disease being discovered in the blood samples, or some other unforeseen event, helicopters would be used to locate instrumented goats and all released animals would be shot. Conflicts with domestic livestock are thought to be nonexistent, nor is any spatial overlap anticipated.

During the 1950s, as many as 50 mountain goats were thought to occur in the Whitefish Range and goats were actively hunted. Mortalities from both legal and illegal hunting were thought to be major contributing factors in their decline. The last reliable reports of goats in the Whitefish Range were in the early 1990s and were likely dispersers from Canada or Glacier National Park.

The Crazy Mountains are an ideal source population for transplant to the Whitefish Range due to the fact they are from the same Crown of the Continent gene pool as those found in Glacier National Park and adjacent Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. Goats in the Crazy Mountains had their origins from 2 transplants from Deep Creek on the Rocky Mountain East Front in the early 1940s. Today there are approximately 400 goats in the Crazy Mountains, and FWP is taking steps to reduce population pressures. Several herds in Montana had their origins or were supplemented with goats from the Olympic Peninsula and are therefore not as suitable for transplant to the Whitefish Range.

There is a strong public interest to establish and maintain mountain goats wherever there is suitable habitat. The Whitefish Range is no exception. People and agencies I have spoken to are strongly in favor of this proposal. They are a valued native animal not only for hunting, but also for wildlife viewing and photography.

9. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no-action alternative) to the proposed action, whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider, and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

<u>Alternative A:</u> No Action

Failure to move goats will result in the status quo. No opportunities to view or hunt goats in the Whitefish Range are available, nor are there opportunities to photograph them.

<u>Alternative B:</u> Proposed Action

FWP proposes to reintroduce mountain goats to the Whitefish Range of northwest Montana by relocating approximately 15 mountain goats from the Crazy Mountains near Big Timber to Stryker Peak. Work would begin as early as January 2011 with the aerial capture of goats in the Crazy Mountains near Big Timber. Goats would be individually marked and placed in individual crates for transport by horse trailer to Stryker Peak. They would then be loaded onto sleds and towed by snowmobile a short distance to the base of the mountain. Efforts would be made to release the goats simultaneously and herd them uphill. Several goats would be instrumented with radio transmitters so their movements can be monitored to better ascertain their use of habitat, movements, and the overall success of the relocation effort.

PART II. PREDICTED ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Alternatives, including secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical and human environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
c. Destruction, covering, or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition, or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:						

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13c.)		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				
f. Other:						

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality, including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen, or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water-related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				
n. Other:						

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity, or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		X				4e.
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:						

4e. Weed seeds could potentially be transmitted in the hair of the transplanted goats, although this is not expected to be a problem.

5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?	X					5b.
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				5d.
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest, or other human activity)?		X				
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				5h.
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				
j. Other:						

5b. The establishment of goats in the Whitefish Range is not thought to result in a significant increase in competition for forage with other ungulates such as mule deer or elk. Conversely, the establishment of goats may provide an important source of food in the form of carcasses from winter-killed animals to scavengers such as wolverines.

5d. Mountain goats occurred as a native species in the Whitefish Range historically, so therefore do not constitute a new species.

5h. Grizzly bears, wolves, and wolverines are all present in the Whitefish Range. The establishment of goats would only be an asset to any threatened, endangered, or sensitive species residing there.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:						

7. LAND USE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other:						

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a.)		X				
e. Other: Risk of disease transmission to domestic livestock?		X				8e.

8e. Mountain goats are not known to be carriers of brucellosis or other diseases that might threaten domestic livestock.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				
f. Other:						

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. An effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. An effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. A need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. An increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources						
f. Define projected maintenance costs.						
g. Other:						

11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				11b.
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				11c.
d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails, or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				
e. Other:						

11b. The aesthetic nature of the area would be improved with the establishment of a goat population.

11c. While some conflicts between snowmobilers and wintering mountain goats have been documented in other areas, none are expected due to the current lack of snowmobile use on the west face of Stryker Peak.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure, or object of prehistoric, historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12a.)		X				
e. Other:						

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard, or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None are thought to be necessary.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The restoration of mountain goats to the Whitefish Range would help fill an ecological niche that has been vacant for almost 50 years, which was probably brought on to a large degree by overhunting. The presence of a viable goat population would not only provide hunting opportunity in the future, but also provide countless people an opportunity to view and photograph them in their natural habitat.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Describe the level of public involvement for this project, if any, and given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this draft EA, the proposed action, and the alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these newspapers: Tobacco Valley News, Whitefish Pilot, and Daily Inter Lake.
- One statewide press release.
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web site: *http://fwp.mt.gov*.

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope, having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will begin October 19, 2010, and extend for 15 days. Written comments will be accepted through 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, November 3, 2010, and can be mailed to the address below:

Tim Thier
FWP Area Biologist
P.O. Box 507
Trego, MT 59934

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)?

No.

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment under MEPA, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action; therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis.

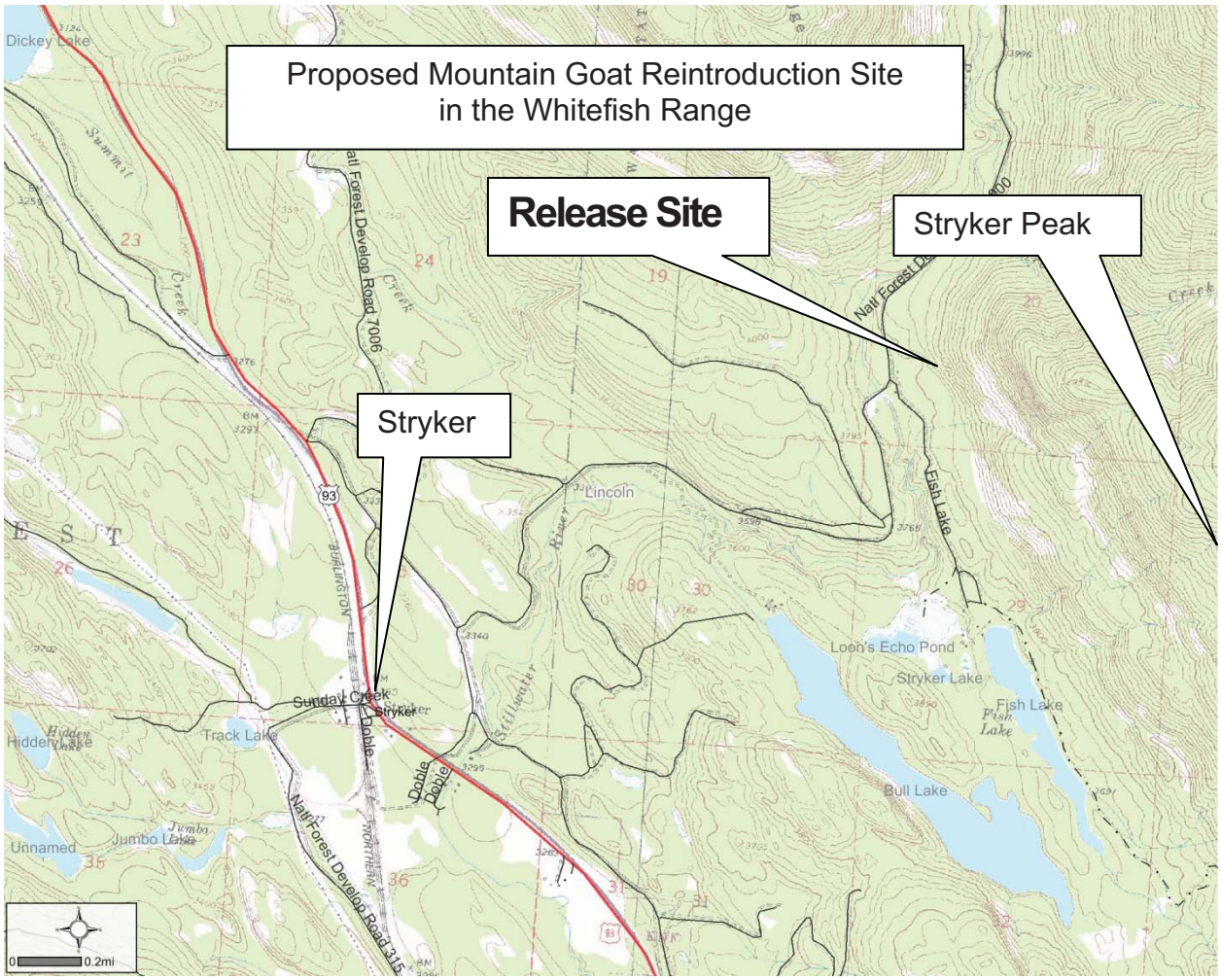
2. Name, title, address, and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

Tim Thier
FWP Area Biologist
P.O. Box 507
Trego, MT 59934
Phone: (406)882-4697

3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Wildlife Division
- Legal Bureau

Flathead National Forest
DNRC, Olney, Montana
Glacier National Park


Proposed Mountain Goat Reintroduction Site
in the Whitefish Range
Release Site
Stryker Peak
Stryker
Dickey Lake
Summit
Creek
Nat'l Forest Develop Road 7006
Lincoln
Fish Lake
Loon's Echo Pond
Stryker Lake
Fish Lake
Bull Lake
Sunday Creek
Stryker
Doble
Track Lake
Hidden Lake
Jumbo Lake
Unnamed
Nat'l Forest Develop Road 315
BURLINGTON
NORTHERN
93
0
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