CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Swan Mountain Snowmobiling Proposal
Proposed Implementation Date	January 25, 2013
Proponent:	Patrick M. Tabor, Swan Mountain Snowmobiling, LLC
Location:	Stillwater State Forest (see below for details)
County:	Flathead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The proposed project would grant a Special Recreational Use License (SRUL) to Swan Mountain Snowmobiling, LLC to provide guided snowmobile tours to clients. The project area is located on numerous sections of Stillwater State Forest and includes State lands in all or portions of Sections 5, 6, 7, Township 32 north, Range 23 west; Sections 13, 14, 23, 24, Township 33 north, Range 23 west; Sections 6, 7, 18, 19, 29, 32, Township 32 north, Range 22 west; and Section 19, 29, 30, 32, 33, Township 33 north, Range 22 west. The lands involved in the proposed project are held by the State of Montana for the support of specific beneficiary institutions. The trust beneficiaries for these sections of State land are Common Schools, State Reform School, School of Mines, Deaf and Blind, MSU – Morrill Grant, State Normal School, and MSU – 2nd Grant . Granting a SRUL to Swan Mountain Snowmobiling would provide additional revenue generation to the appropriate trust beneficiaries .

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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

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

A public scoping letter that described the guided snowmobiling proposal was sent to interested groups and Department of Natural Resource and Conservation (DNRC) resource specialists on November 7, 2012. Comments on the proposal were requested; the comment period was open through November 21, 2012. No public comments were received on this proposal.

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 in the project area.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

No-Action Alternative A

A SRUL would not be granted and revenue would not be generated for the appropriate school trusts for the Swan Mountain Snowmobiling proposal at this time. Current Land Use Licenses, general recreational use, additional requests for permits, and other ongoing management requests may occur.

This alternative can be used as a baseline for comparing the effects that Action Alternative B would have on the environment. This alternative is considered a possible alternative for selection.

Action Alternative B

The proposed SRUL would permit Swan Mountain Snowmobiling, LLC, to operate guided, commercial snowmobile trips on approximately 24.6 miles of open roads currently used and maintained (groomed) for snowmobiling. These roads are used during the winter season by two

additional commercial snowmobile operations, as well as numerous private individuals utilizing the groomed trail system. Up until five years ago, a total of three commercial users were operating snowmobile tours in the proposed area. The proposed SRUL would bring the number of commercial operators back to three. Guided trips could begin December 1st of subsequent years and would run no later than March 31st. The SRUL would allow one guided trip per day with a maximum of 8 snowmobiles.

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. Use of the snowmobiles would be limited to established roads and trails unless otherwise authorized by the Forest Officer.

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. Use of the snowmobiles would be limited to established roads and trails unless otherwise authorized by the Forest Officer.

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.

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. Minimal clearing of ground brush and dead downed trees would be required to open existing roads and trails.

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.

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.

	SPECIES/HABITAT	DETERMINATION – BASIS
Threatened and Endangered Species	Canada lynx (*Felis lynx*) Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types, dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zones	Suitable Canada lynx habitat occurs within the proposed license area and lynx use of the area is possible. Canada lynx have been observed within the vicinity of the license area in the past (MNHP 2013). The areas proposed for the SRUL currently receive considerable snowmobile use by commercial guides and private individuals. The additional snowmobile activity would not alter suitable lynx habitat and would not be expected to measurably affect lynx use of the area. Thus, negligible adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Canada lynx would be anticipated.
	Grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*) Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity	The proposed license area occurs in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) Recovery Area (USFWS 1993) for grizzly bears. Proposed activities would occur during the grizzly bear denning period (November 15-March 31) on open roads currently receiving considerable snowmobile use. The additional snowmobile activity proposed would not alter grizzly bear habitat and would not be expected to measurably affect bear denning behavior in the area. Thus, negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to grizzly bears would be anticipated.
Sensitive Species	Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) Habitat: Late-successional forest less than 1 mile from open water	Portions of the proposed license area occur within the home ranges of the Whitefish Lake and Lower Stillwater Lake bald eagle pairs. The open roads and parking areas associated with the proposed SRUL already experience considerable amounts of private and commercial snowmobile use. Additionally, both eagle pairs experience more intense levels of disturbance from recreational boaters and nearby home sites than what the more distant snowmobile areas produce. Thus, these eagle pairs are likely habituated to high levels of disturbance, including existing snowmobile use in the specific locations considered in this SRUL. The majority of the proposed activities would occur outside of the eagle breeding season during the winter months. Collectively, negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to bald eagles would be anticipated as a result of the proposed action.
	Black-backed woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*) Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest	No recently (less than 5 years) burned areas are in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to black-backed woodpeckers would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
	Coeur d'Alene salamander (*Plethodon idahoensis*) Habitat: Waterfall spray zones, talus near cascading streams	Proposed activities would occur during the winter, when salamanders are inactive. Snowmobile activities would not affect potential habitat. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Coeur d'Alene salamanders would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.

	Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus Phasianellus columbianus*) Habitat: Grassland, shrubland, riparian, agriculture	No suitable grassland communities occur in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to Columbian sharp-tailed grouse would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
	Common loon (*Gavia immer*) Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation	Proposed activities would occur during the winter when loons have migrated out of the area. Snowmobile activities would not affect potential habitat. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to common loons would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
	Fisher (*Martes pennanti*) Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian	Suitable fisher habitat exists in the proposed license area and fisher use is possible. Proposed activities would occur during the winter months (December - March) on open roads currently receiving considerable amounts of snowmobile use. The additional snowmobile activity proposed would not alter fisher habitat and would not be expected to measurably affect fisher use of the area. The proposed activities would not increase trapping risk as they would occur on an existing established snowmobile trail system. Thus, negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to fishers would be expected to occur under the proposed action.
	Flammulated owl (*Otus flammeolus*) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest	Proposed activities would occur during the winter when flammulated owls have migrated out of the area. Snowmobile activities would not affect potential habitat. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to flammulated owls would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
	Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*) Habitat Features: Ample big game populations, security from human activities	The annual home range of the Lazy Creek wolf pack currently occupies much of the proposed license area and future use of the area by wolves is likely (Kent Laudon, DFWP, personal comm. 2012). The areas proposed for the SRUL currently receive considerable snowmobile use by commercial guides and private individuals. The additional snowmobile activity would not would not be expected to measurably affect use of the area by wolves or big game prey. Thus, negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to gray wolves would be expected to occur under the proposed action.
	Harlequin duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) Habitat: White-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates	Proposed activities would occur during the winter, when harlequin ducks have migrated out of the area. Snowmobile activities would not affect potential habitat. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to harlequin ducks would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.
	Northern bog lemming (*Synaptomys borealis*) Habitat: Sphagnum meadows, bogs, fens with thick moss mats	No suitable sphagnum bogs or fens occur in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to northern bog lemmings would be expected to occur as a result of either alternative.

	Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands	Proposed activities would occur during the winter, non-breeding months when peregrine falcons are absent from the area. Potential nesting habitat would not be affected. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to peregrine falcons would be anticipated as a result of either alternative.
	Pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	Suitable pileated woodpecker habitat is present in the proposed license area. Use of the area by pileated woodpeckers is likely. The areas proposed for the SRUL currently receive considerable snowmobile activity by commercial guides and private individuals. Any pileated woodpeckers in the area are likely habituated to disturbance along these open roads. The additional snowmobile activity would not be expected to measurably affect use of the area by pileated woodpeckers. Thus, negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to pileated woodpecker would be expected to occur under the proposed action.
	Townsend's big-eared bat (*Plecotus townsendii*) Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines	No suitable caves or mine tunnels are known to occur in the project area. Thus, no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to Townsend's big-eared bats are anticipated as a result of either alternative.
	Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) Habitat: Alpine tundra and high-elevation boreal and mountain coniferous forests, areas that maintain deep persistent snow into late spring	Potentially suitable wolverine habitat exists within the proposed license area and occasional use by wolverines is possible. Wolverines have been documented in the southern Whitefish Range as recently as 2012 (A. Jacobs, USFS Biologist, pers. comm. March 17, 2012). The areas proposed for the SRUL currently receive considerable snowmobile activity by commercial guides and private individuals. Given the existing relatively high levels of human activity in the area, large home range area (average 150+ sq. miles) wolverines occupy, and long distances wolverines typically cover during their movements, the snowmobile activity proposed in addition to what is currently occurring would not be expected to measurably affect use of the area by wolverines. Thus, negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to wolverines would be expected to occur under the proposed action.
Big Game Species	Elk (*Cervus canadensis*) Moose (*Alces americanus*) Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)	Winter use of the proposed license area by big game species is likely, particularly at lower elevations near Highway 93 or Whitefish Lake. The areas proposed for the SRUL currently receive considerable snowmobile activity by commercial guides and private individuals. Any big game species in the area are likely habituated to disturbance along these open roads. The additional snowmobile activity would not be expected to measurably affect use of the area by big game species. Thus, negligible direct, indirect or cumulative effects to big game species would be expected to occur under the proposed action.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

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

None. Should historical archeological or cultural features be discovered during construction, a cultural resource specialist would be notified and work in that area would be suspended until the site can be properly evaluated.

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.

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.

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.

- SE Stryker Ridge Timber Sale Environmental Assessment – March 2010

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.

Risks pertaining to the proposed project include, but are not limited to, injury or loss caused by the following: variations in terrain, surface or subsurface snow or ice conditions, cornices, avalanches, poor visibility, bare spots, rocks, trees or other forms of forest growth or debris, and trail-maintenance equipment that is plainly marked. Snowmobilers would assume the risk of all legal responsibility for injury to themselves or loss of property that results from participating in the sport of snowmobiling by virtue of his participation. Snowmobilers would be responsible for knowing the range of their own ability to snowmobile any slope, trail, or area, and for snowmobiling within the limits of their ability, maintaining control of speed and course at all times while snowmobiling, heeding all posted warnings, and refraining from acting in a manner that may cause or contribute to the injury of anyone. A minimum of safety training in winter survival and avalanche awareness for all tour guides would be required.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

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

None.

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.

A few jobs related to recreation may be created.

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.

Due to the relatively small size of the proposal, no measurable cumulative impact on tax revenues would be expected from this proposed action.

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.

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.

On March 13, 2003, the Department adopted Administrative Rules for Forest Management (*ARM 36.11.401 through 450*). The lands involved in this project would be managed in accordance with the Rules.

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.

The proposed project area falls within a larger area that is currently used for commercially guided snowmobile tours on Stillwater State Forest; these tours use trails and roads that are groomed each winter by the Flathead Snowmobile Association. A positive working relationship between the multiple users would be expected.

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.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

None.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

None.

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.

If an SRUL is granted and proves beneficial, the State would collect 5 percent of the Licensee's gross revenue and require a non-refundable fee of $500.00 to be paid in advance of operations. License fees would be distributed to the appropriate school trusts as identified under the heading 1. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Nicole Stickney	Date: January 22, 2013
	Title: Special Uses Forester	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED: The Action Alternative B is the chosen alternative. This alternative meets the intent of the project as stated in Section I –*Type and Purpose of Action*. Mitigation measures have been designed into the project to help implement good management practices on the ground and reduce effects to the various resources affected by the proposed action.

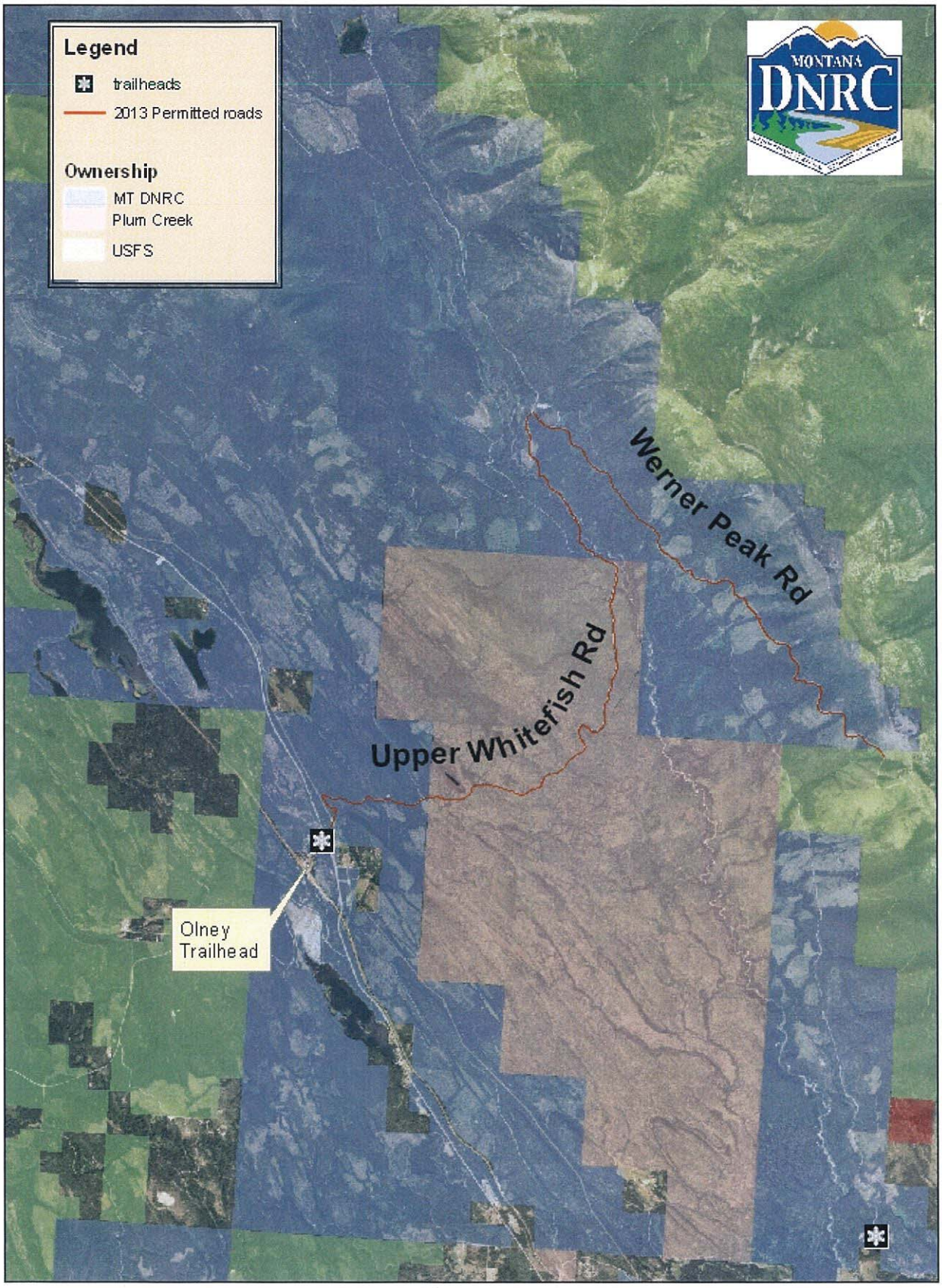
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS: I find that the Action Alternative will not have significant impacts on the human environment for the following reasons:

- Individually and cumulatively, the identified impacts are within Department policies, standards, and applicable State laws.

The proposed activities will not be conducted on unique or fragile sites. This alternative will not preclude analysis of future actions on State land.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[x]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Brian Manning	
	Title: Stillwater Unit Manager	
Signature: Brian Manning		Date: 1/24/13

EA Map, Swan Mountain, LLC