

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Poker Jim Butte Fire LookoutOther names/site number: 24RB2233

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A**2. Location**Street & number: National Forest Service Road 4801City or town: Approximately 20 miles south of Ashland State: MT County: RosebudNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☒**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national X statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

MT State Historic Preservation Officer

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title:

State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☐  
Public – Local ☐  
Public – State ☐  
Public – Federal ☒

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒  
District ☐  
Site ☐  
Structure ☐  
Object ☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>	sites
<u>                    </u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>                    </u>	<u>1</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT  
OTHER: Fire Lookout

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Fire Lookout

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: 1936-plan "Redicut L-4 Lookout House"

### Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: N/A

Walls: WOOD/Weatherboard; Glass

Roof: WOOD/Shingle

Other: WOOD (Tower); CONCRETE (Tower Footings)

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

The Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout consists of a L-4 pattern lookout house (often referred to as a "cab" by Forest Service employees) placed on the top of a thirty-foot tall three-bay tower. Constructed in 1955, the tower consists of four large nearly vertical timbers, each slightly sloping toward center. The location at an elevation of 4,348 feet on the apex of Poker Jim Butte offers a full 360-degree viewshed that includes the Bighorn Mountains to the southwest, swaths of timber, and the grasslands of the distant landscape of the Northern Plains of southeastern Montana (maps 2 and 3). The largest nearby drainage is the East Fork Hanging Woman's Creek, just over 2 miles to the south. The viewing elevation for an individual standing inside the lookout house approximates an elevation of 4,383 feet. The integrity of the structure is quite strong, as it has been in its present form and served its current function since 1955. The Forest Service continues to staff the fire lookout tower through the summer and fall seasons.

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#### Narrative Description

##### **Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout** (one contributing building)

Located adjacent to the Poker Jim Picnic Ground, the Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout is a later-constructed L-4 pattern Lookout House, a structure once common throughout the US Forest



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Service Northern Region (Region 1) [Photo  
MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0001].<sup>1</sup>

**The Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout**

Constructed in 1955, the L-4 pattern cabin of the Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout sits atop of a 30-foot tall T-30 style tower of four large vertical timbers, each sloping very slightly toward the center (photos MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0002, 0003, and 0004).<sup>2</sup> Each side of the tower is visually divided into three vertical bays, x-braced with smaller dimensional timbers and spiked to the main members. The sawn timbers that serve as the main upright supports are set upon concrete foundations. Additionally, four steel cables anchor the upper end of the supports to concrete blocks buried in the ground. Including the guy line outliers, the structure commands an 85-foot x 85-foot footprint. The structure is braced with crossed, sawn timbers, which also support the stair landings. Two of the landings occur inside of the structure, with the third located outside providing entry onto the catwalk and thus the cabin interior. Dimensional lumber comprises the stairways, with 2x4s used for handrails on both sides of the stairway(s). At the top, a rectangular trap door provides access to the catwalk and the interior. The interior contains a propane refrigerator, small stove, and a light. The interior is also populated with an Osborne Firefinder, located centrally in the upper space (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0005), accompanied by a frame bed, two small cabinets, a table and chair, and miscellaneous communication equipment. All interior accoutrements are low-profile so as not to obstruct the view.

A small concrete pad with two steps is located at the base of the stairs. Originally, a small rectangular storage building constructed of wood framing was located inside the bottom level, but was removed sometime after 2001.

Poker Jim Butte's standard L-4 cabin is comprised of a pre-cut 14-foot x 14-foot frame covered by a hip roof that "rests on a wood plank deck on top of the upright supports."<sup>3</sup> Three sides of the cabin (south, north, and west) contain five rectangular window assemblies that comprise the upper two-thirds of the cabin walls. Each of the window assemblies hold two-over-two rectangular panes. The fourth side of the cabin (east) includes a door with a four-pane window, and four window assemblies of similar composition and character as the other three elevations. Eight rectangular plywood window coverings hinged along the upper window frames swing down to cover and protect the windows when the lookout cabin is not being used. A narrow wood plank catwalk deck surrounds the cabin. A dimensional lumber three-board guardrail attaches to the outside of the catwalk deck. (photos MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0003 and 0004). Around 1962, the cabin, storage building, stairs, and guardrails were painted white or yellow. Today, the tower cabin and catwalk guardrails sport brown stain while the landing stairway guardrails are painted yellow.

<sup>1</sup> Janene Caywood, *L-4 Fire Lookouts in the USFS Northern Region (Region 1), 1932-1967* Multiple Property Document (cover documentation approved 1/25/2018, NR #MC100002040).

<sup>2</sup> Mike Bergstrom, *Poker Jim Lookout*, Heritage Resource Program Site Record, January 11, 2007, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ray Kressek, *Fire Lookouts of the Northwest*, (Ye Galleon Press: Fairfield, WA, revised third Edition, 1998), p. 399.

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A small solar panel is affixed to the bottom timber of the south-facing catwalk. All communication antennae, formerly mounted on the structure were removed when a nearby communications tower was erected, but with cell phone service available, that tower has also since been removed. A windsock once mounted on the tower has since been removed. Propane fuel is provided to the cabin via copper tubing that runs from a (noncontributing object) propane tank (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0006), located on the ground near the base of the tower. The fuel provides energy for the stove, refrigerator, and light.

In 2008, repairs made to the Poker Jim Butte Lookout Tower occurred to address safety issues caused by deteriorating materials, and to restore some materials to their original composition and appearance. During that summer, the stairs and rails were replaced as were the catwalk deck and floor joists, which run east-west and support both the cabin and catwalk. The shake roof, window coverings, siding, and overhangs were restored to their original materials. Kirby Matthew, Region 1 Historic Preservation Team Leader supervised the work that was coordinated with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office.<sup>4</sup>

**Propane Tank** (one noncontributing object)

A 500-gallon propane tank (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0006), approximately 9 feet 11 inches long and 3 feet 1 ½ inches in diameter, sits to the north of the lookout structure.

**Picnic Shelter** (counted as one noncontributing structure)

The 10-foot x 24-foot open shed picnic shelter is constructed of six round 2 ½-inch steel vertical pipes that support a wood framed shed roof topped with ribbed metal (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0008). A picnic table constructed of vertical concrete pedestals supports the wood plank seats and table that runs the length of the shelter. The shelter is positioned on the southwest side of the butte and provides a spectacular view of the surrounding area. Nearby and positioned close to a firepit are three low benches consisting of concrete piers and wooden seats. Two additional similarly constructed picnic tables and fire pits are positioned to the north of the shelter. There is a small parking lot located to the south of the fire lookout tower structure providing access to the picnic area.

**Latrine** (one noncontributing building)

An 8-foot x 8-foot handicap accessible precast gable roof latrine mounted on an 8-foot x 14-foot concrete pad (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0007) sits south of the lookout tower. The south half of the building consists of an 8-foot x 6-foot partial-wall open entry and the north half is fully enclosed. The current pumpable latrine replaces a series of previous outhouses of a more traditional construction.

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<sup>4</sup> Letter regarding the proposed undertaking from Elizabeth A. McFarland, District Ranger to Pete Brown, Historic Architecture Specialist, Montana Historical Society, June 10, 2008. Letter is on file with the Custer Gallatin National Forest Office in Billings, Montana.

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### **Integrity**

Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout retains all seven aspects of historical integrity: location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The structure stands in its original location, in a setting appropriate for its function as a fire lookout tower. Although three recent noncontributing features are located within the immediate purview of the lookout, all are small, especially when compared to the lookout itself, and detract little from the overall immediate setting. The larger grandiose setting has changed little since the tower's construction. Positioned atop Poker Jim Butte, the feeling and association remain strong due to the structure's rural location complimented by the intact and beautiful setting. The lookout's continued association also remains with the Forest Service (originally the Custer National Forest, later merged to become the Custer Gallatin National Forest), as it has since its inception, a partaker in many regional fires. The open-view design remains intact from the original plans, appropriate for accessing the unchanged full viewshed for which the tower was built. The materials and workmanship are representative of the standard L-4 lookout stations, a once common resource used throughout the northwest. Safety concerns necessitated the replacement of certain tower components with historically appropriate in-kind materials. Similarly, restoration work brought other components back to their historic appearance also using appropriate materials with the work conducted under the guidance of the Region 1 Historic Preservation Team coordinated with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

POLITICS / GOVERNMENT

CONSERVATION

ARCHITECTURE

ENGINEERING

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1955-1972

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1955

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C, at local and state levels of significance. Under Criterion A, the fire lookout tower is associated with the legacy of the US Forest Service's early fire detection program. Under Criterion C, the structure is a fine example of an intact and still functioning pattern L-4 Lookout House. The original lookout placed on Poker Jim Butte in 1935 was removed in 1955 and replaced with the current structure, beginning the period of significance of the lookout tower in its present form. The period of significance extends to 1972, the end of the historic period.<sup>5</sup>

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **Early History In and Around the Ashland Ranger District**

Indigenous peoples have been present in the area now known as the Ashland District of the Custer Gallatin National Forest for many thousands of years. Interaction with new groups of immigrants accelerated following the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. Following the treaty, the future location of Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout was included in an immense area assigned to the Crow Tribe. Immigration increased in 1864, with the railroads extending westward, as early railroad land grants were awarded in the present Ashland area.<sup>6</sup> The continued reduction in size of the land originally assigned to the Crow Tribe resulted in ranchers and homesteaders appearing in the area in greater numbers around 1878.<sup>7</sup> Later, in 1884, the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation was established immediately west of the future lookout location.

### **Settlement in the Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Area**

Of the many newcomers immigrating to the vast region of the future location of the Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout, perhaps the group with the greatest impact and oversized influence were the ranchers who claimed large swaths of land, often at the expense of others. The stockmen represent the primary settlers of the area and continue to dominate the area, with the present population largely comprised of the original ranch families.<sup>8</sup> In 1880, Englishman Sydney Paget's Anglo-American Cattle Company trailed one of the first large herds of cattle to the

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<sup>5</sup> The Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout is not being listed under the *L-4 Fire Lookouts in the USFS Northern Region (Region 1), 1932-1967 Multiple Property Document* (MC100002040, cover documentation approved 1/25/2018), which lacks a context for the Custer Gallatin National Forest.

<sup>6</sup> William Clark, *Custer National Forest Lands, A Brief History* (Custer National Forest, Billings, 1982), p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Cultural Landscape of the Upper Tongue River Valley in Rosebud County, Montana*, Montana Preservation Alliance, 516 North Park Avenue, Suite A, Helena, MT 59601, July 2007, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> William Clark, *Custer National Forest Lands, A Brief History* (Custer National Forest, Billings, 1982), p. 30.

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Tongue River in the form of 2,000 Texas longhorns.<sup>9</sup> Another early large operation in the area was founded by John B. Kendrick of Sheridan Wyoming. Kendrick founded both the OW Ranch on Hanging Woman Creek, east of the future location of the Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout, and the Kendrick Ranch. Kendrick of Sheridan, Wyoming, built upon his cattle success to eventually become a Wyoming Governor, U.S. Senator from Wyoming, and served three terms in the Montana House of Representatives, in addition to his instrumental role in the formation of the Montana Stockgrowers Association. The SH Ranch, owned by the Joseph Scott & Hanks Cattle Company arrived in 1880, bringing an estimated 20,000 cattle into the Tongue and Powder River basins for the abundant green grass.<sup>10</sup> In 1884, the Three Circle Ranch was formed approximately eight miles from the future location of the fire lookout by brothers Ed Brown and Joseph T. Brown, who trailed 1,000 cattle into the area from what was then the Oklahoma Indian Territory.<sup>11</sup> Walter and Tiffany Alderson, also among the first cattle ranchers in the area, established the Bones Brothers Ranch, approximately seven miles west of the future location of Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout, in 1883.<sup>12</sup> Calvin Howes, his wife Sarah, and their three boys Levi, Augustus, and Robert, also immigrated to the area in the early 1880s. Retired from New England as a Captain of sailing ships, the Howes family moved west to raise cattle. They eventually relocated the Circle Bar Ranch along Otter Creek, approximately 10 miles to the east of the future lookout site, moving their operation there in 1883.<sup>13</sup> One concern all the cattle ranches shared was the possibility of fire. As described by Levi S. Howes:

One of the drawbacks to the cattle business then was the prairie fires, which were sometimes set by lightning and sometimes by outlaws or Indians, and we had to drop everything to fight the fires in order to protect the grass. We usually fought fire at night as it burns much less readily then. Where it was in the timber, we “back fired” around the timber, but where it was in the grass, we had to whip it out. To whip out fire in the grass, we used a young pine sapling about as large as we could swing, and struck with a circular motion to brush the sparks and burning substances back from the grass. At night a mountain side all ablaze and overhead a dark sky of smoke is a beautiful sight. By day we watched the whipped-out area, as otherwise it would often break out afresh.<sup>14</sup>

Although the number of cattle grew exponentially in a short period of time, immigration proved disastrous to the ever-diminishing number of bison in the area. In October of 1884, Charles Fields of Otter, Montana, killed the last remaining free roaming buffalo on the lower end of

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<sup>9</sup> *Cultural Landscape of the Upper Tongue River Valley in Rosebud County, Montana*, Montana Preservation Alliance, 516 North Park Avenue, Suite A, Helena, MT 59601, July 2007, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> *Cultural Landscape of the Upper Tongue River Valley in Rosebud County, Montana*, MPA, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> *Cultural Landscape of the Upper Tongue River Valley in Rosebud County, Montana*, MPA, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> *Cultural Landscape of the Upper Tongue River Valley in Rosebud County, Montana*, MPA, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> *Custer National Forest Lands: A Brief History*, p. 33.

<sup>14</sup> Levi S. Howes, “Chapter 2: Coming West.” In *Montana Territory*, (Family published, 1927), p. 22.

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Horse Creek in what is now the Ashland District.<sup>15</sup> Levi Howes commented in his journal, "It was an old bull and we saw him from the house. Two men went over and chased him on horseback and shot him."<sup>16</sup>

In 1884, following a further reduction of the size of the Crow Reservation, the Cheyenne Reservation was created, bordered on the east by the Tongue River.<sup>17</sup> Sixteen years later, in 1900, congress allotted money to purchase homesteaders land on the west bank of the Tongue River and extended the eastern edge of the reservation to the Tongue. In 1903 and 1907, the Cheyenne received a total of 2,000 cattle from the US government for division among those interested in stock raising, reinforcing the dominance of cattle in the Ashland District area. By 1912, the Northern Cheyenne boasted cattle totaling 12,000 head. In 1924, however, the Bureau of Indian Affairs ended the private and tribal cattle operations, subsequently leasing much of the land used for grazing to local ranchers.<sup>18</sup>

Cattle ranches continued to grow through the early 1880s until the harsh winter of 1886, which signaled the beginning of the end of the open range system of ranching, when some ranchers lost up to 2/3rds of their herds.<sup>19</sup> Many of the ranches rebounded by the end of the decade evidenced by the Howes Ranch, which ran 8,000 to 10,000 cattle by 1889.<sup>20</sup>

In 1907, the Otter National Reserve was established. The name changed soon after, in 1908, to the Custer National Forest, comprised of 15 forest reserves and national forests. Two of the Forest's districts, including the Ashland District, originated from land granted to the Crow Tribe in the 1851 Laramie Treaty.<sup>21</sup> The origins of the Reserve/Forest was in part due to the realization of the majority of local ranchers recognizing that the open range situation, the number of cattle, and the potential for wildfire, were problems best handled by some sort of centralized system.<sup>22</sup> By this time, cattle proved ubiquitous to the district area; a report estimated 250,000 Animal Unit Months of grazing capacity existed in the nascent reserve.<sup>23</sup> The establishment of the reserve and the resultant grazing permits calmed many of the disagreements over grazing rights and areas.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Levi S. Howes, "Chapter 3: The Years 1883-1884." In *Montana Territory*, (Family published, 1927), p. 36; Harry Daily (recorder), *Last Buffalo Killed on Otter Creek*, Historical Date Record, Custer Gallatin National Forest, December 11, 1936.

<sup>16</sup> Howes, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> *Custer National Forest Lands: A Brief History*, P. 33.

<sup>18</sup> Clark, pp. 34-36.

<sup>19</sup> Clark, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Clark, p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Clark, p. 38

<sup>22</sup> Clark, p. 38

<sup>23</sup> Clark, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> Clark, p. 35.



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Much of the just over one-half million acre-Ashland Ranger District displays an arid prairie and a foothill environment.<sup>25</sup> The confusing intermixes of forest and non-forest land in the Ashland area moved Regional Forester Silex to recommend that the entire Ashland Division be let go as National Forest and opened for settlement. Interestingly, the large ranchers in the area successfully stepped up and vigorously protested this idea, defending the Forest Service permit system as bringing some form of sensible regulation to the grazing areas.<sup>26</sup>

The headquarters of first Otter Forest Reserve, and subsequently redesignated Custer National Forest, moved several times through its early history. Initially in Miles City, it moved to Ashland, then back to Miles City, and then in 1932, the headquarters moved to Billings.<sup>27</sup>

The year 1920 witnessed the addition of the Sioux National Forest as a district, followed in 1932 by the splitting of the Beartooth National Forest between the Custer and the future Gallatin National Forest. With the addition of the Beartooth National Forest, the Custer National Forest consisted of the Stillwater, Rock Creek, Ashland, Fort Howes, Ekalaka, Sioux, and Pryor Mountain districts.<sup>28</sup> Unlike many forests, the Custer (now the Custer Gallatin) National Forest differed from many as not all the districts were, nor are, contiguous. At the time of the first and later Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout construction, the three generally forested districts of the Custer National Forest consisted of the Beartooth, Sioux, and the Ashland, the district where the subject of this nomination stands.<sup>29</sup>

As a result of the 1906 Forest Homestead Act and the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, the period from 1915-1925 witnessed the greatest settlement in the Ashland area. Despite the influx of settlers, the quality, or lack thereof, of the soil, the scarcity of rain, and general topography consigned many to realize that farming wasn't a practical vocation. The difficult times of the late 1920s followed by the Depression and the 1930s forced many to sell, often to the large cattle operations.<sup>30</sup>

In the years after World War I, many area ranches fell into difficult financial times. The low demand for beef and horses obligated ranches to accept visitors willing to pay for the 'ranch experience.' The earliest dude ranchers in America were the Eaton brothers (Alden, Willis, and Howard) who came west from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1879 to establish their first ranch near what is now Medora, North Dakota. Although they began the practice as early as 1882, the early 1900s saw a massive increase in the business, further fed by an explosion of western movies. In 1902, the Eaton Brothers moved their ranch to the base of the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming and the location became the center of the new industry. During the 1920s and 1930s, the region between Buffalo, Wyoming, Sheridan, Wyoming, and Birney, Montana, immediately west of the

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<sup>25</sup> Clark, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Clark, p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> Clark, pp. 33, 36.

<sup>28</sup> Clark, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> Brett French, "Custer National Forest Marks 100 Years," *The Billings Gazette*, October 9, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Clark, p. 38

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Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout, played home to 38 operating dude ranches.<sup>31</sup> The increased number of dude ranches in the area raised concerns about the possibility of wildfire and how such an event could affect their business. The scourge of fire would not only compromise business directly in terms of potential loss of life but it could also result in long-term financial loss—visitors to the area came for the scenery and “dudes” wouldn’t want to visit an area burned out by wildfire.

E.M. Daniels of the 5A Ranch near Birney, observed in the early 1930s that fire was one of many issues faced by ranchers at the time, but noted that the range had steadily improved with its administration by the Forest Service.<sup>32</sup>

Commercial logging, which occurred in the Ashland District prior to the 1920s, accelerated with the demand for construction lumber and the production of railroad ties into the 1950s. Local need for poles and posts, and lumber also fueled logging, generally supplying the small sawmills.<sup>33</sup> Compared to many of the forests to the west with significant stands of timber, the Ashland District supplied modest amounts of lumber. However, the logging industry, like the ranchers, always remained vigilant regarding the possibility of wildfire and its potential financial effects. The vastness of the area easily lent itself to the possibility of wildfire.

From 1934-1937, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) stationed camps at Whitetail and the Otter Creek Camp, 20 miles south of Ashland. The Whitetail Camp sat approximately 45 miles away from the Poker Jim Fire Lookout to the northeast, with the Otter Creek Camp approximately 13 miles to the east. Workers from the camps constructed structures that included reservoirs and roads throughout the District. Utilizing the local geologic sandstone, they created many culverts utilizing a distinctive dry-stacked masonry method. They were also quite possibly responsible for the construction of the original fire lookout that graced Poker Jim Butte in 1935.

Mining never gained a strong foothold in the District, other than the small local mines. Since 1977, strip mining is excluded from the Ashland (and other districts) of the Forest. Today, as in the past, cattle ranching serves as the primary economic driver of the region. The Ashland District, however, also greatly benefits the local economy, especially through recreational opportunities that abound on its land.

In 2014, the Custer National Forest and the Gallatin National Forest merged into the Custer Gallatin National Forest. The organization now oversees over 3 million acres in Montana and South Dakota. The Ashland Ranger District of the Custer Gallatin National Forest encompasses approximately 436,000 acres in southeast Montana (maps 1 and 2). With a landscape rich in red-tinged badlands (photos MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0018 and 0019), grass prairie and forested hillsides (photos MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0016, 0017, and 0020), the district is the

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<sup>31</sup> *Cultural Landscape of the Upper Tongue River Valley in Rosebud County, Montana*, MPA, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Clark, p. 36.

<sup>33</sup> Clark, p. 38

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largest contiguous block of land under Federal ownership in eastern Montana and home to one of the largest grazing programs in the nation.<sup>34</sup>

### National Forest Fire Management in Region 1<sup>35</sup>

One of the primary goals of the US Forest Service has been protection, from the Forest Reserve Act passage in 1891 and continuing to the present.<sup>36</sup> “Officers of the Forest Service, especially forest rangers, have no duty more important than protecting the reserves from forest fires.”<sup>37</sup> Henry S. Graves, dean of the Yale Forestry School, headed the US Forest Service for the decade immediately after the catastrophic Big Burn of 1910, which tremendously impacted management practices and set in motion plans to upgrade fire monitoring efforts in the west (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0010).<sup>38</sup> Following five years of experimentation in fire control and preliminary administrative site surveys by the Forest Service, management plans were developed to address “1) general administration, 2) silviculture management, 3) grazing management, 4) permanent improvements, 5) forest protection, and 6) uses of the forest, such as settlements, special uses, water power, and administrative sites.”<sup>39</sup>

Fire protection always held the top spot in forestry planning. In 1911, Graves further distilled the need for national forests projects and the goal of such projects. All construction projects aimed at facilitating 1) forest protection from fire, 2) administration of the business of the forest, and 3) development of the forest’s resources—three categories that defined the agency’s role for years.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Ashland Ranger District*, Custer Gallatin National Forest, Accessed on 8-24-2021 at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/custergallatin/about-forest/districts/?cid=stelprd3827078>.

<sup>35</sup> The majority following Forest Service discussion, is synthesized from Janene Caywood’s excellent, *L-4 Fire Lookouts in the USFS Northern Region (Region 1), 1932-1967* Multiple Property Document (cover documentation approved 1/25/2018, NR #MC100002040). Footnotes for the Forest Service discussion remain as presented in the Multiple Property Document.

<sup>36</sup> The Forest Reserve Act of 1891 authorized the president of the United States to set apart and reserve forested lands for the public interest. These “forest reserves,” were to be managed by the General Land Office under the Department of the Interior. In 1897, Congress passed the Organic Administrative Act, which stipulated that the purpose of forest reserves was to protect watersheds and lands that were chiefly valuable for sustained timber production. The 1905 Transfer Act moved management of the forest reserves to the Bureau of Forestry within the Department of Agriculture. Five months after passage of the Transfer Act, the Bureau of Forestry was formally renamed the U. S. Forest Service.

<sup>37</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, *The Use of the National Forest Reserves: Regulations and Instructions* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905). The Use Book was a pocket-sized guide containing a summary of Forest Service regulations designed to be used by agency employees and by the public.

<sup>38</sup> Timothy Egan, *The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America*, (HMH Books, Boston, Massachusetts, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Janene Caywood, *L-4 Fire Lookouts in the USFS Northern Region (Region 1), 1932-1967* Multiple Property Document (cover documentation approved 1/25/2018, NR #MC100002040), p. 2; United States Department of Agriculture, *Forest Service National Forest Manual 1911-1913* (Washington: Government Printing Office).

<sup>40</sup> USDA Forest Service, *Report of the Forester for 1911* by Henry S. Graves (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911).

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While slow, by 1915 some progress occurred toward fire protection efforts in Region 1:

Considering the development of the fire protective organization at its present stage with the organization as it was in 1910, we can unqualifiedly say that great progress has been made. Our methods of fire fighting have improved; our lookouts have been developed.<sup>41</sup>

More lookouts were needed despite progress. In May of 1916, Region 1's Acting Regional Forester Rutledge sent a letter addressed to all forest officers. The letter outlined the region's policy toward establishing, developing, and maintaining lookout points, with a focus on detecting and suppressing wild fires.<sup>42</sup> Rutledge also defined two categories of lookout points: "Primary points" and "Secondary lookouts." Primary represented those where guards were seen as an "essential part of the fire plan," potentially year-round. Secondary, as the name denotes, were only manned during emergency fire conditions.<sup>43</sup> Rutledge identified the standard "lookout house" in Region 1 as a 12-foot by 12-foot frame building with a "band of glass entirely around the building at a convenient height for observation."<sup>44</sup> Peaks that lacked height to provide a good overview of the area necessitated the construction of taller buildings or taller towers to serve as the observatory. Optimal height of the observation tower was calculated by:

Survey lines across the highest part of the peak and over the two parts of the mountain which it is necessary to clear to the approximate point to which vision is necessary. Then construct a profile and by intersection lines determine the height to which it will be necessary to build to provide satisfactory vision.<sup>45</sup>

Construction of lookouts continued at a relatively slow pace despite the regional plan for lookout point development. Under the dictate of "forest protection," the construction of lookouts soon took a great step forward across the region in all districts.

### ***Clyde Fickes and Forest Lookout Design***

In 1927, Clyde Fickes, a legend in Forest Service history, initially worked on the Pend Oreille National Forest in Northern Idaho. That year, an allotment of money arrived for the construction of a lookout on Smith Peak in the Port Hill District. At the time, however, no construction plans existed for such a structure. Fickes, an able carpenter, soon put his skills toward the design of the lookout. Fickes created an affordable 12-foot by 12-foot frame building with a 6-foot by 6-foot

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<sup>41</sup> "General Report of the Fire Situation of 1915 District One," pp 1-2. Folder 5100 "Fire Historical 1915-1918 Fire Seasons," Box 51, RG 95 Records of the Forest Service Region 1, Missoula, Montana Historical Collection 1903-1990 (hereinafter RG 95 Historical Collection) National Archives and Records Administration, Seattle, Washington (hereinafter NARA Seattle).

<sup>42</sup> Acting District Forester Rutledge to Forest Officers, O -Fire Memo, May 9, 1916. Folder: Lookouts Historical 1 of 2, Box 45, RG 95 Historical Collection, NARA Seattle.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. pp. 6-7.

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“cupalo.”<sup>46</sup> In 1928 he fabricated the structure and packaged it with appropriate hardware for a successful first installation. This success lead Fickes and his family to soon relocated to Missoula, Montana, for the purpose of designing a lookout for use in Region 1. Fickes’ initial attempt appears similar to his Region 6 lookout design in size and shape. In the case of the Region 1 design, however, Fickes used standard millwork and hardware readily available at most lumberyards. Fickes’ design allowed for the construction of a lookout at the staggeringly low cost of \$400.<sup>47</sup>

Following a major wild fire in the Clearwater National Forest along the Lochsa River, the Regional Office pondered ways to improve fire discovery without incurring undue hardship on the foresters who manned them. Regional Forester Evan Kelley suggested building a 14-foot by 14-foot building for better visibility of the surrounding area in those locations selected to host a lookout. Fickes soon designed an L-4 14-foot by 14-foot prototype with wood frame cabin topped with a gable roof.<sup>48</sup> The dimensions of the cabin allowed room for both fire-finding equipment and quarters stationed in the lookout. Soon after, Fickes modified the L-4 design plans with a pyramidal (hipped) roof replacing his earlier gable roof, presenting the cabin design much as it stands today.<sup>49</sup> Fickes designed the walls to hold ribbons of nine-light units and sliding wood window sashes. He employed drop siding to cover exterior walls below the windows and cedar shingles to protect the roof. When manned, top-hinged exterior shutters that protected the windows from the elements could be raised. The L-4 proved quite functional as it could be constructed both on a tower and on the ground. In 1931, Evan Kelley, the Regional Forester, approved the drawings for the Fickes’ pyramidal roof L-4 lookout house.<sup>50</sup>

The L-4 represented one of three lookout shelters included in the *Region One Handbook Construction and Maintenance of Forest Improvements*, compiled by Fickes.<sup>51</sup> The handbook incorporated plans beyond the actual shelters and also included plans for catwalks and towers of different heights, based on increments of 10 feet. Labelling towers followed a formulaic application; 10-foot-high towers received the moniker “T-10,” 20-foot-high towers were labeled “T-20s”, up to the T-50. Each tower plan was labeled “Lookout Tower with Living Quarters for use with Plan L-4.” Battered or slanted legs of untreated materials characterized early towers. Original plans directed wood bracing for towers that stood 10 feet to 30 feet in height and cable bracing for those built from 40 feet to 50 feet in height.<sup>52</sup> In addition to the L-4 design, the

<sup>46</sup> Caywood, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Caywood, p. 7; Clyde P. Fickes, Forest Ranger Emeritus, “Recollections,” 1972. Folder: 1680 Historical Lewis & Clark NF Moose Creek Campground, etc., Box 76, RG 95 Historical Collection, NARA Seattle.

<sup>48</sup> The “L” in the L-4 plan probably refers to the building’s function, i.e., L for lookout.

<sup>49</sup> Although the reasons for this modification have not been identified, it may have to do with the fact that rafters for pyramidal roofs require shorter rafters, thus less material and of sizes that were easily ‘cargoad’ on mules.

<sup>50</sup> Lookout House Plan L-4. Clyde Fickes *Region One Handbook Construction and Maintenance of Forest Improvement* (USDA Forest Service, Region One, Missoula, Montana 1935 revised edition).

<sup>51</sup> The original issue date of the handbook’s remains unknown, though a revised and reissued volume appeared in December of 1935.

<sup>52</sup> Caywood, p. 9.

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handbook included plans for the smaller L-6 and L-7 shelters and a simple patrol tower surmounted by a platform (Patrol Tower T-3).<sup>53</sup>

The timing of the Region 1 handbook occurred at an exceptionally fortuitous, or potentially calculated, moment as it corresponded with the creation of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Created in 1933, the CCC provided labor to national forests with the US Forest Service assuming the major share of CCC-associated projects.<sup>54</sup> The significance of the CCC's role on the completion of projects in the National Forests was undeniable. Prior to the CCC's arrival, lookout construction in the region totaled only 14 lookouts by 1920. An uptick in construction during the decade of the twenties witnessed another 191 lookouts constructed.<sup>55</sup> The year 1938 witnessed 838 lookout points receiving some type of structure, with slightly more than half utilizing the L-4 lookout house plans.<sup>56</sup> The bottom line regarding the CCC and its National Forests association was the organization's instrumental impact on the number of structures built in the forests at this time, which included the original 1935 Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0010).

**Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout, Time for a New and Safer Lookout**

The name "Poker Jim" is affixed to the topographical references of Poker Jim Butte, the Poker Jim Fire Lookout atop the butte, and the long since removed Poker Jim Ranger Station, built in 1910, and located along the Davis Prong drainage, approximately three miles south of the lookout (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0011).

It remains unclear when the moniker began use in the area, but the geographic reference dates back to at least 1894 when the mention of the creek by that name appeared in a regional news article about cattle rustling.<sup>57</sup> Located on a sandstone pillar northwest of the apex of the butte appear many historic inscriptions of past visitors to the area, including one denoting, "Poker Jim 1879" (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0021).

Multiple anecdotes exist about the origin of the name "Poker Jim," including one that relates that the land changed hands in the late 1800s when one owner lost it in a poker game. Another story tells a tale where a foreman rode up on a group of cowboys playing poker and fired the one running the game, presumably Poker Jim. This story was verified by an inhabitant who lived in the area since 1884, Charles Field. He narrated his story to F. C. Curtiss of the Custer National Forest on December 1, 1939 that:

A cowboy by the name of Jim Matkinson, working for the S. H. Ranch, owned by a man by the name of Joe Scott, was sent to round up stock near the above mountain.

<sup>53</sup> Patrol Shelter or Tower Cupalo Plan L-6. Fickes *Region One Handbook* 1935; Patrol Tower T-3. Fickes *Region One Handbook* 1935.

<sup>54</sup> USDA Forest Service, *Report of the Forester for 1936* by F. A. Silcox (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936).

<sup>55</sup> Caywood, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Caywood, p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> "Wanton Destruction," *The Billings Gazette*, Saturday, May 26, 1894, p. 4.

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Another cowboy went with him. While out, they sat down on top of the butte and played poker. The Foreman came along, caught them and discharged them. Ever since that time, the butte has been known as Poker Jim.<sup>58</sup>

A second, more colorful anecdote regarding butte's appellation and other nearby points involves another "Poker Jim" who worked cattle during the same period in eastern Montana and the western Dakota badlands.<sup>59</sup> Poker Jim Cooper was thought to be somewhat of an outlaw that came into the territory with a cattle drive from the south.<sup>60</sup> He was employed by Frenchman Pierre Wibaux of the large W Bar Ranch. Wibaux, a contemporary of Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Mores, differed from those two as his ranch turned a profit. Leonard Lund relayed the tale in 1973 of Poker Jim's demise to the *Minot Daily News*:

During the winter of 1894, Poker Jim and a companion, Cash Lantis, were stationed at the line camp at the mouth of Hay Draw near the Little Missouri. By February their food supply had gotten so low that Poker Jim was delegated to ride to Glendive, Montana, at least 65 miles away for provisions.

But he never made it back. About a week later cowboys found his frozen body propped against a huge scoria rock along a small frozen creek about 10 miles from the cow camp. Poker Jim's horse, tied to a tree, had eaten off the bark. Burned matches about the corpse were evidence that Poker Jim had tried to build a fire.

Harlowe (Tough) Bentley reported that Poker Jim, whose love for gambling was exceeded only by his fondness for whisky, had seemed a little sick from drinking when he left the Smith Creek line camp that last morning.

After staying overnight with Bentley at the horse camp, Poker Jim began the 16-mile ride back to his camp on Hay Draw. Those who found Poker Jim's frozen body carried it into a small shack and placed it across the rafters, in cold storage.

Later another group of men gathered at the shack for a poker game. They heated the building and the body gradually thawed. Finally, it fell right onto the poker table directly below. According to the tale, no poker game ever broke up so fast.

Poker Jim was laid to rest beside his old friend, Sid Tarbell, the first person to be buried on the hill overlooking the cow camp.

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<sup>58</sup> *Poker Jim Butte & Poker Jim Ranger Station.*, Historical Date Record, D-5, Fort Howes District Ranger Frank C. (F. C.) Curtiss (recorder) of Charles Field, Custer Gallatin National Forest, December 1, 1939; Clark, p. 34

<sup>59</sup> "As it was in Billings 45 years ago," *The Gazette of March 7, 1894, The Billings Gazette*, Tuesday, March 7, 1939, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> *24 Feb, Poker Jim*, Dakota Datebook, North Dakota Stories from Prairie Public, Merry Helm, The Digital Press at the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND, 2019, p. 62.

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The now-called Poker Jim Cemetery located near the Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park in the North Dakota Badlands continues to bear the name of this 19<sup>th</sup> century cowboy. Nine of Jim's contemporaries moved the stone where he sat frozen to its present location at his grave site several years after his passing; the stone remains in this location to the present.<sup>61</sup>

The presence of a lookout on Poker Jim Butte dates to the spring of 1936 (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0012).<sup>62</sup> In addition to the Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout, three other observation stations in the Ashland District of the Custer National Forest were established following the regional directives (Map 3).<sup>63</sup> These included: Liscom Butte, in the northern part of the district, established as an observation camp in 1939, converted to a R-6 in 1958 and removed circa 2009;<sup>64</sup> Yager Butte, in the central part of the district, established as an observation camp in 1939, converted to a R-6 structure in 1957, and removed in 2021;<sup>65</sup> and Phillips Butte, stationed as a tent cabin in 1940, abandoned in the 1950s<sup>66</sup> and later replaced as a lookout location by nearby Diamond Butte, also on the eastern edge of the district.<sup>67</sup> Diamond Butte initially stood as a single-story wood-frame building erected by the Job Corps in 1956. In 1968, the present upper wood-frame structure was built on top of a cinder-block structure; it currently serves as a rental. Each location evolved through a series of structures before arriving in their current forms, all eventually upgraded and equipped with mapping, communication, and minimalistic living quarters equipment. Except for the Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout, none of the others feature the L-4 style.

The location of the Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout, about 15 miles northeast of the National Register-listed Bones Ranch and east of the Tongue River, became popular, not only with area ranchers, but also with tourists, evidenced by the 186 names from 19 states that appeared on the lookout's register following the summer of 1937.<sup>68</sup> The popularity of the area in general grew, especially with hunters, some of whom were not universally appreciated by the residents of the area. By 1935, people who lived near the Poker Jim Ranger Station, located in the Davis Prong drainage approximately three miles south of the lookout, lodged complaints stating the hunters endangered their lives. "Bullets apparently fired by hunters, splintered through the walls of their home;" and another complained that "game seekers killed one of his horses and three head of cattle."<sup>69</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Debbie Crossland, "Poker Jim Cemetery," *Sidney Herald*, February 26, 2010.

<sup>62</sup> "Tales of the Town," *The Billings Gazette*, September 29, 1937, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> The Custer National Forest merged with the Gallatin National Forest to create the current Custer Gallatin National Forest.

<sup>64</sup> Rex Kamstra, *Liscom Butte Lookout*, accessed at [www.firelookout.com](http://www.firelookout.com) on November 22, 2021.

<sup>65</sup> Rex Kamstra, *Yager Butte Lookout*, accessed at [www.firelookout.com](http://www.firelookout.com) on November 22, 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Rex Kamstra, *Phillips Butte Lookout*, accessed at [www.firelookout.com](http://www.firelookout.com) on November 22, 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Rex Kamstra *Diamond Butte Lookout*, accessed at [www.firelookout.com](http://www.firelookout.com) on November 22, 2021;

<sup>68</sup> The Bones Brothers Ranch was listed in the National Register on March 19, 2004 (NR #04000220); "Tales of the Town," *The Billings Gazette*, September 29, 1937, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> "Hunters Endanger Poker Jim Folks," *The Billings Gazette*, December 4, 1935, p. 10.



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Despite some unruly hunters, the Station served as a base for many agricultural, hunting and camping activities during the early 1900s. These activities included use by the Boy Scouts who undoubtedly found the presence of a "Bathing Pool" quite attractive.<sup>70</sup> As the Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout assumed a greater role in local Forest Service operations, such as the distribution of forest permits, the need for the continued operation of both facilities fell and resulted in the closure of the Poker Jim Ranger Station prior to 1952.<sup>71</sup>

By 1953, Region 1 recognized the deteriorated condition of many of the lookouts under its control, including the one sitting atop Poker Jim Butte. To address possible safety issues, Region 1 developed a five-year plan to replace those structures showing the greatest duress. However, although deteriorated, many of these structures, Poker Jim included, still served integral roles of the agency's fire protection program. To this end, the region purchased 49 lookout kits in the 1953 and 1954 with, construction funding secured for most. Prioritizing lookout replacement for the forests that completed the transition to an air-ground detection system proved easier because they had already identified the lookout points critical to their fire detection plan. Forests not converted to the air detection system faced more of a challenge:

The most difficult part of our future planning is in making the proper decisions in regard to those units (forests) not yet on air-detection basis. About the best that we can do is stick with the high-priority points and turn thumbs down on any of those that are questionable.<sup>72</sup>

Guidance provided by the Region assisted the forests for the selection of which lookouts remained, albeit, with replacement structures:

1. No lookout will be given a priority in the replacement program until after a complete inspection has been made by a qualified engineer or other person familiar with construction principles.
2. No lookout will be included in the replacement program on western forests until after at least a preliminary air-ground detection plan has been developed for the unit concerned or the present detection plan reviewed by this office. This is needed to help set priorities and avoid making mistakes.
3. Safety will be given primary consideration in setting up priorities on the replacement list.

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<sup>70</sup> "Miles City Considers Plans for Boy Scout Camp Next Month," *The Billings Gazette*, May, 18, 1928, p. 11;  
"Plans Are Shaping for Scout Camp at Poker Jim Station," *The Billings Gazette*, June 23, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> "Forest Permit Stations Named," *The Billings Gazette*, October 11, 1952, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Ralph L. Hand "History of Region 1 Lookout System," August 23, 1954. Folder: Historical: Lookouts, Box 46, RG 95 Historical Collection, NARA Seattle. Note that the number of developed lookout points varies depending on the source of the information. All documents agree however, that the number of developed lookouts region-wide was in the range of 830 to 840.

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4. Replacement will be deferred if it is determined feasible to make major repairs and if such repairs will lengthen the safe life of the structure to an appreciable degree.

5. Last minute shift to another lookout, after a structure has been delivered, will be allowed only in exceptional cases.<sup>73</sup>

The replacement of the original lookout on Poker Jim Butte indicates the butte was considered a “high-priority point.” Initial analysis by the Region identified 35 lookouts that needed immediate replacement. An additional 100 were identified for replacement within five years. The Forest Service wasted little time to erect the new structures as by 1955 many, including the new Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout, were built or under construction.

Region 6 (Oregon and Washington) produced the revised plans for the updated L-4, which garnered consent by the regional forester in 1936, later amended in 1944 and 1948.<sup>74</sup> The replacement lookouts used by the Forest Service, including at Poker Jim Butte, held with the basic L-4 design with a few modifications.

The replacement lookouts featured a 14-foot by 14-foot footprint and a pyramidal hip roof. One change included fixing the shutters in the open position, a design feature contrary to the original top-hinged shutters easily propped open with struts. The shutters bolted to interior ceiling rafters that extended beyond the four exterior walls of the building. Four-light windows replaced the nine-light units of the original design; one of the interior windows of each bank opened via a casement set-up. Fir flooring replaced maple, another deviation from the 1931 plan. Tower design changes included the use of straight legs and treated lumber. The 1955 Poker Jim Fire Lookout displays all of these modifications (Photo MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteFireLookout\_0013). Like its predecessor, the 1955 lookout served, and continues to serve, its purpose well, with many fires spotted from its cabin; its location also resulted in the occasional threat by the very element its construction meant to hinder.<sup>75</sup> Lookout replacement continued through the 1960s, though by this time the R-6 Flattop comprised the design.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> P. D. Hanson, Regional Forester “Memorandum for Forest Supervisors E (F) Improvements Lookout Replacement Program,” November 18, 1954. Folder: E Improvements Bitterroot Lookout Replacement; Box 6; BIT05; RG 95 BNF, NARA Seattle; Caywood, p. 18.

<sup>74</sup> A. Richard Guth and Stan B. Cohen, *A Pictorial History of the U.S. Forest Service 1891-1945 Northern Region*, pp. 108-109 (Missoula: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, Inc. 1991). It is interesting that the Washington Office of the US Forest Service published a set of standard lookout plans in 1938, which included the 1936 iteration of the L-4 lookout. Neither Region 6 nor the Washington Office credited Clyde Fickes for his efforts in producing the first L-4 prototype. USDA Forest Service “*Standard Lookout Structure Plans* (Washington D.C.: USDA Forest Service Division of Engineering).

<sup>75</sup> “15 Blazes in Custer Forest,” *The Billings Gazette*, July 20, 1966, p. 14.

<sup>76</sup> Caywood, p. 20

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Several organizations have contributed to the upkeep of the Poker Jim Butte Lookout through the years including the Job Corps, who constructed new “sanitary facilities” at the site in 1967.<sup>77</sup>

The top-of-the-butte site and its commanding 360-degree view, continues to be a popular place to visit and hold activities. Since at least 1998, Shakespeare in the Park has been held atop the butte in the shadow of the lookout tower.<sup>78</sup>

After years of exposure to the elements, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout received some necessary attention in 2008. The years it served as a sentinel to thwart fire necessitated repairs to address safety issues caused by deteriorating materials. In addition, work entailed some restoration of materials to their original composition. Work to the stairs, railings, catwalk and joists were conducted by the Region 1 Historic Preservation Team. The team also focused on the roof, window coverings, siding, and overhangs, restoring these components to their original materials.<sup>79</sup>

The current structure continues to function in its intended role well, contributing to the continuing fire management program of the US Forest Service. A visitor to the area from the late 1950s would find the landscape and structure familiar and unchanged. The Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, as the structure is significantly associated with the legacy of the US Forest Service’s early fire detection program, and under Criterion C, as the structure continues to serve as an intact and still functioning L-4 Lookout House.

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<sup>77</sup> “Custer Expands Facilities,” *The Billings Gazette*, August 12, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> “Area Activities,” *The Billings Gazette*, July 17, 1998, p. 8D.

<sup>79</sup> Letter regarding the proposed undertaking from Elizabeth A. McFarland, District Ranger to Pete Brown, Historic Architecture Specialist, Montana Historical Society, June 10, 2008. Letter is on file with the Custer Gallatin National Forest Office in Billings, Montana.

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Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

\_\_\_ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
\_\_\_ previously listed in the National Register  
\_\_\_ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
\_\_\_ designated a National Historic Landmark  
\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

\_\_\_ ☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
\_\_\_ Other State agency  
\_\_\_ ☒ Federal agency  
\_\_\_ Local government  
\_\_\_ University  
\_\_\_ Other

Name of repository: Custer Gallatin National Forest

Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout  
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Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 6.5 acres, based on a 300' radius circular area

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(Enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 45.324820° Longitude: -106.365610°  
Position indicated is center of circular acreage.

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The property lies in the SE1/4 of S. 8, T6S R44E. The center point of the property corresponds to the lookout itself. A 300-foot diameter boundary centered on the lookout defines the National Register boundary. The property includes all the resources associated with the site since the lookout's construction in 1955, including those noncontributing features installed more recently. The aerial map on Section 9, Additional Documentation, page 33, confirms this boundary.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary circle encompasses all contributing and noncontributing structures and objects associated with the operation of the lookout and also a representative amount of nearby setting. The circle generally covers the entire relatively flat top of Poker Jim Butte and the extents of notable surface disruption.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Timothy Urbaniak, PhD  
organization: TRU Technologies  
street & number: 503 Calhoun Lane  
city or town: Billings state: Montana zip code: 59101  
e-mail: turbaniak@bresnan.net  
telephone: 406-259-6595  
date: August 19, 2021

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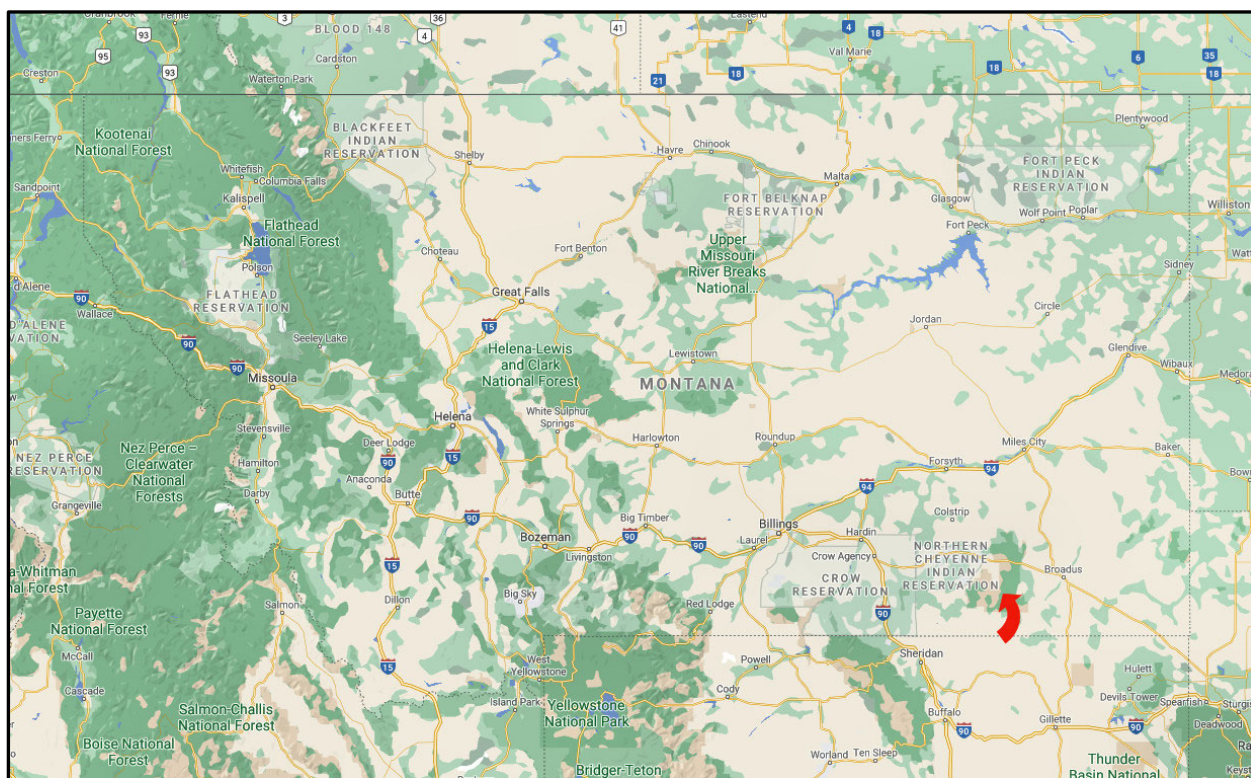
Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout  
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## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5- or 15-minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)



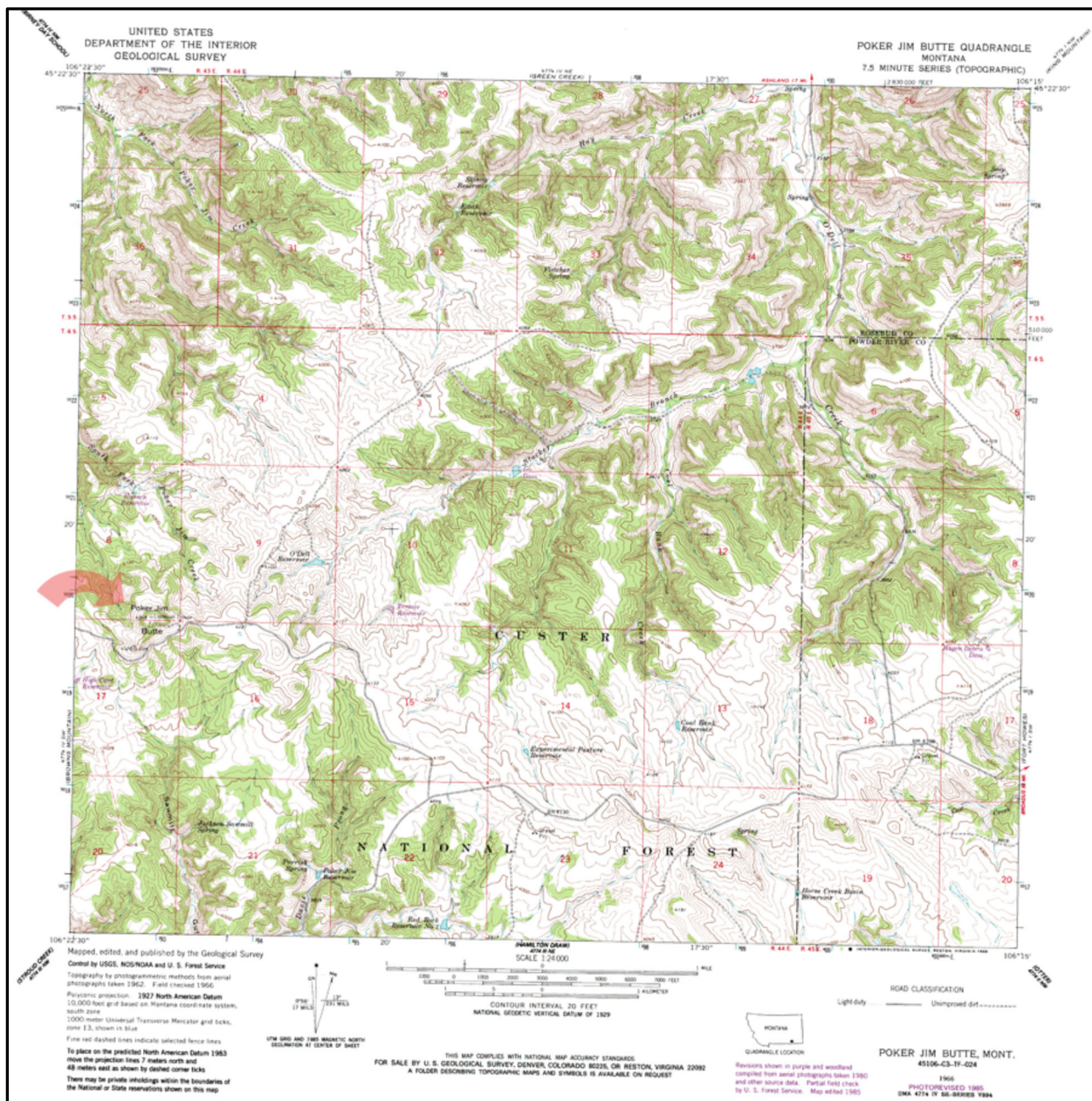
**Map 1. State of Montana Location Map: Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**

**Source: Google Maps**

SE1/4 of S. 8, T6S R44E. Center Point = Latitude: 45.324820 Longitude: -106.365610°

Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout  
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**Map 2. Location Map: Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
**Source: Poker Jim Butte USGS Quad**

SE1/4 of S. 8, T6S R44E. Center Point = Latitude: 45.324820 Longitude: -106.365610°

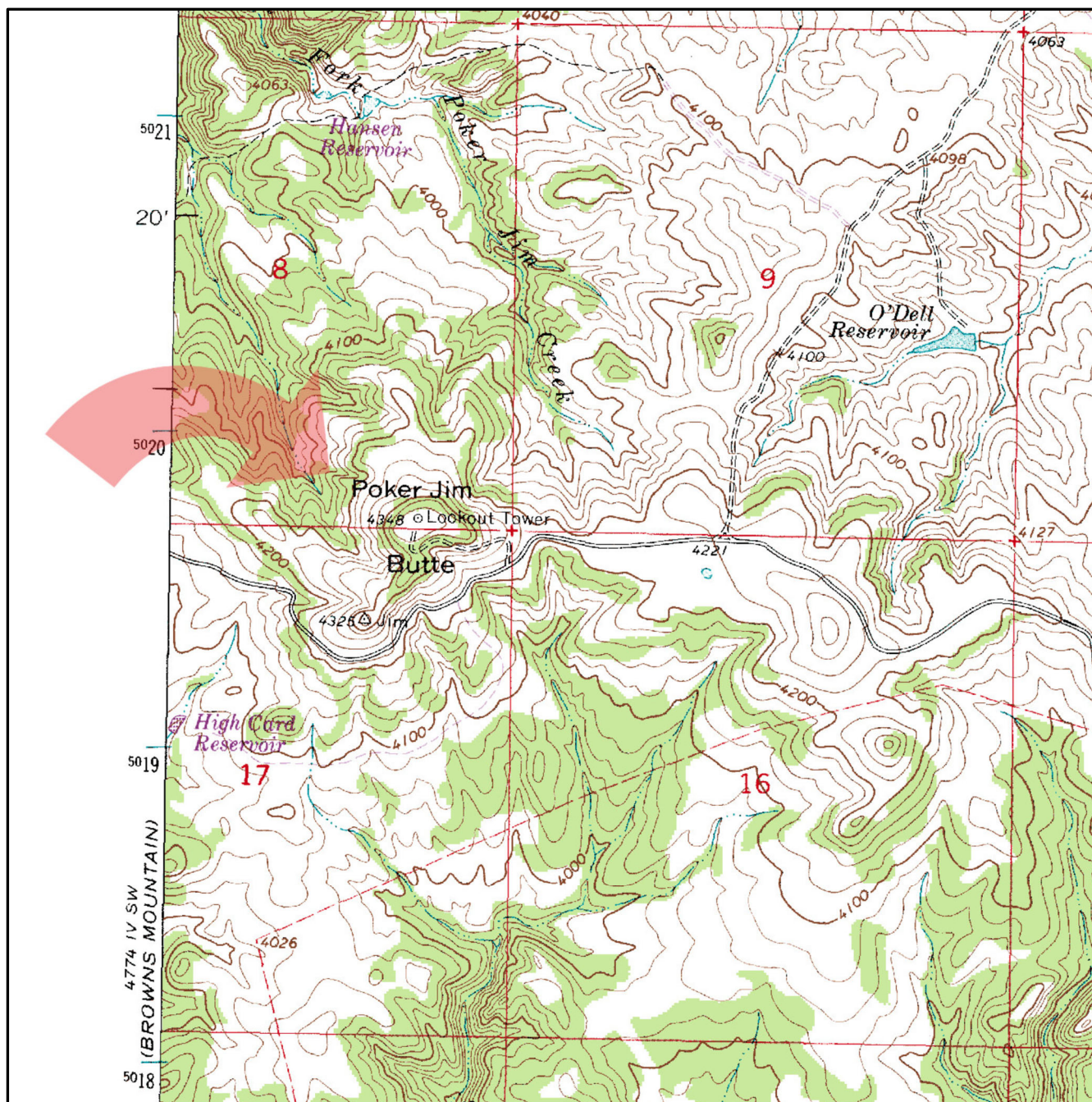


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**Map 3. Location Map: Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**

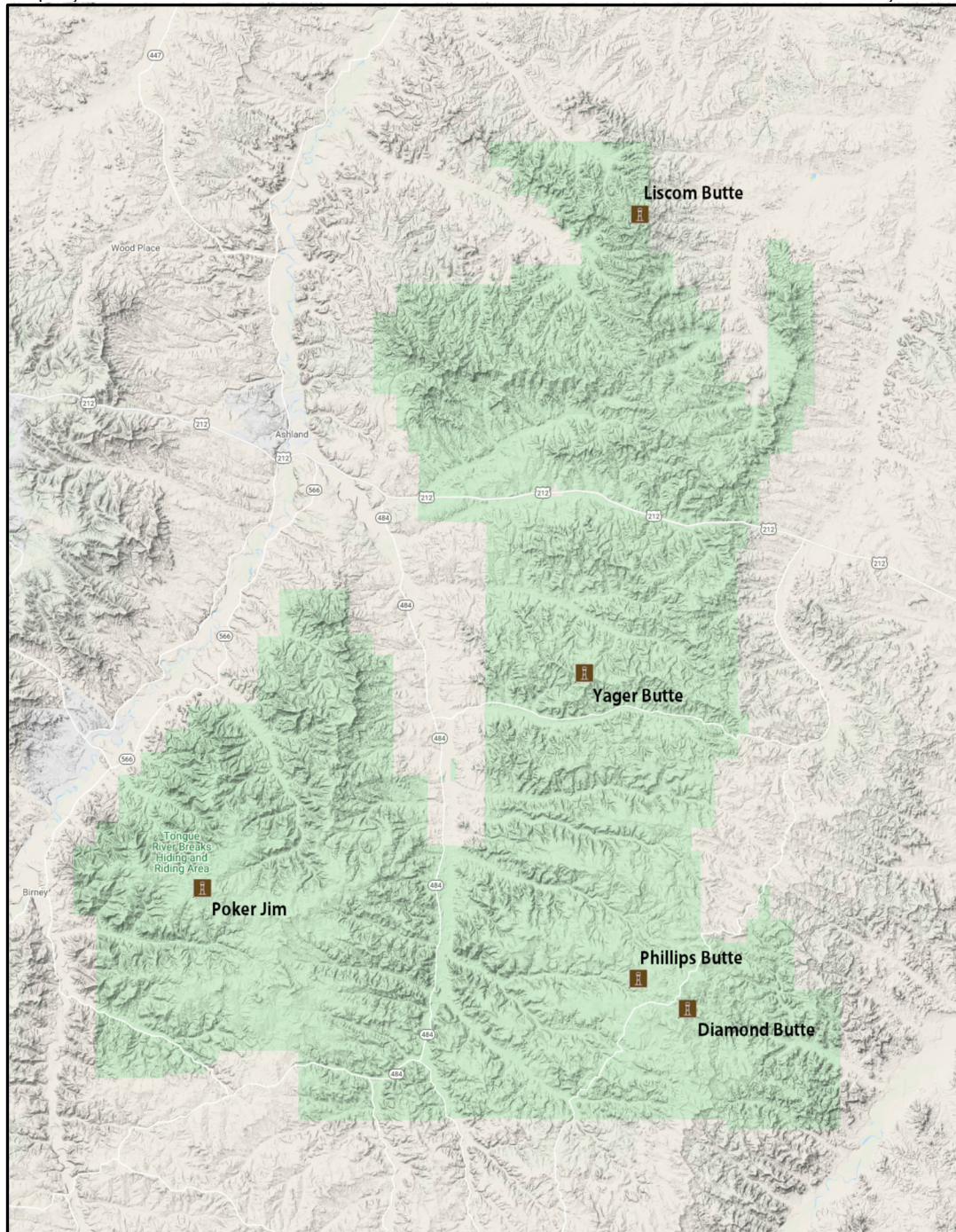
**Source: Poker Jim Butte USGS Quad**

SE1/4 of S. 8, T6S R44E. Center Point = Latitude: 45.324820 Longitude: -106.365610°



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**Map 4. Location Map: Ashland Ranger District Fire Lookouts**

Source: [www.firelookout.com](http://www.firelookout.com)

SE1/4 of S. 8, T6S R44E. Center Point = Latitude: 45.324820 Longitude: -106.365610°

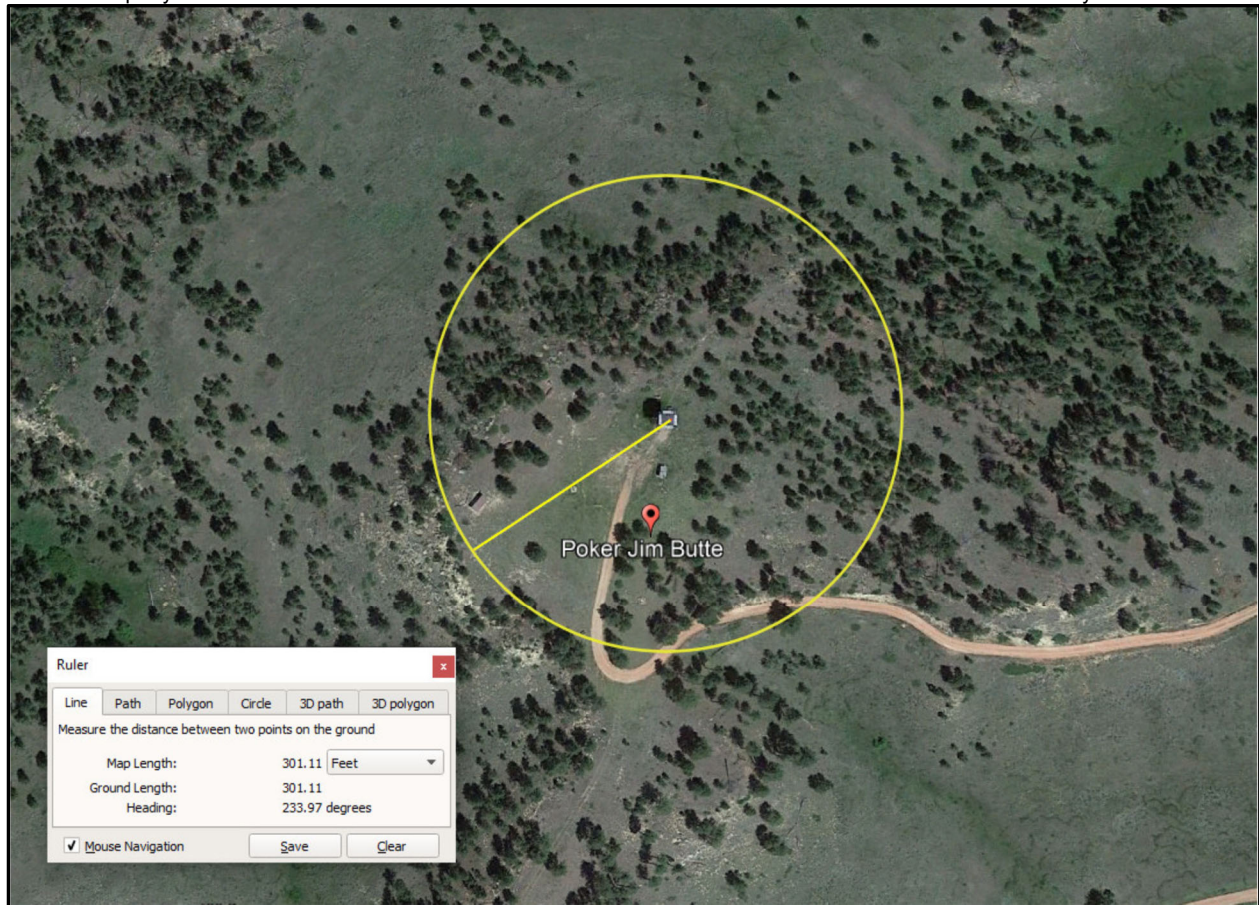


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**Map 5. Location Map: Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower Boundary Map**  
**Source: Google Earth**

SE1/4 of S. 8, T6S R44E. Center Point = Latitude: 45.324820 Longitude: -106.365610°



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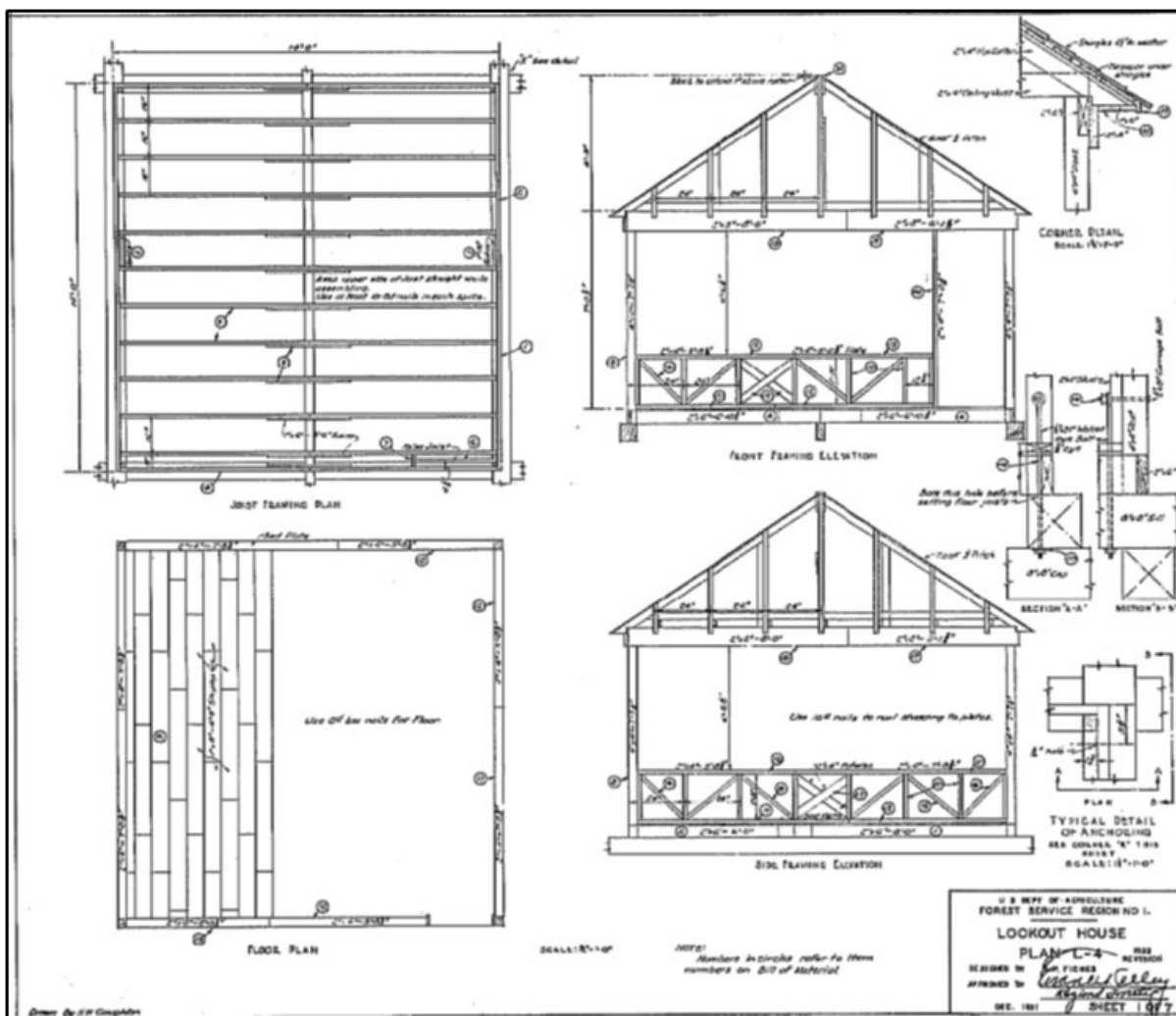
**Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower Landscape View Looking North Map Source: Google Earth**



**Aerial Detail Feature: Fire Lookout, 2: Propane Tank, 3: Latrine, 4: Picnic Shelter  
Map Source: Google Earth**

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Lookout House Plan L-4, Sheet 1 of 7, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower

L-4 Construction Plan, 1932 revision<sup>80</sup>

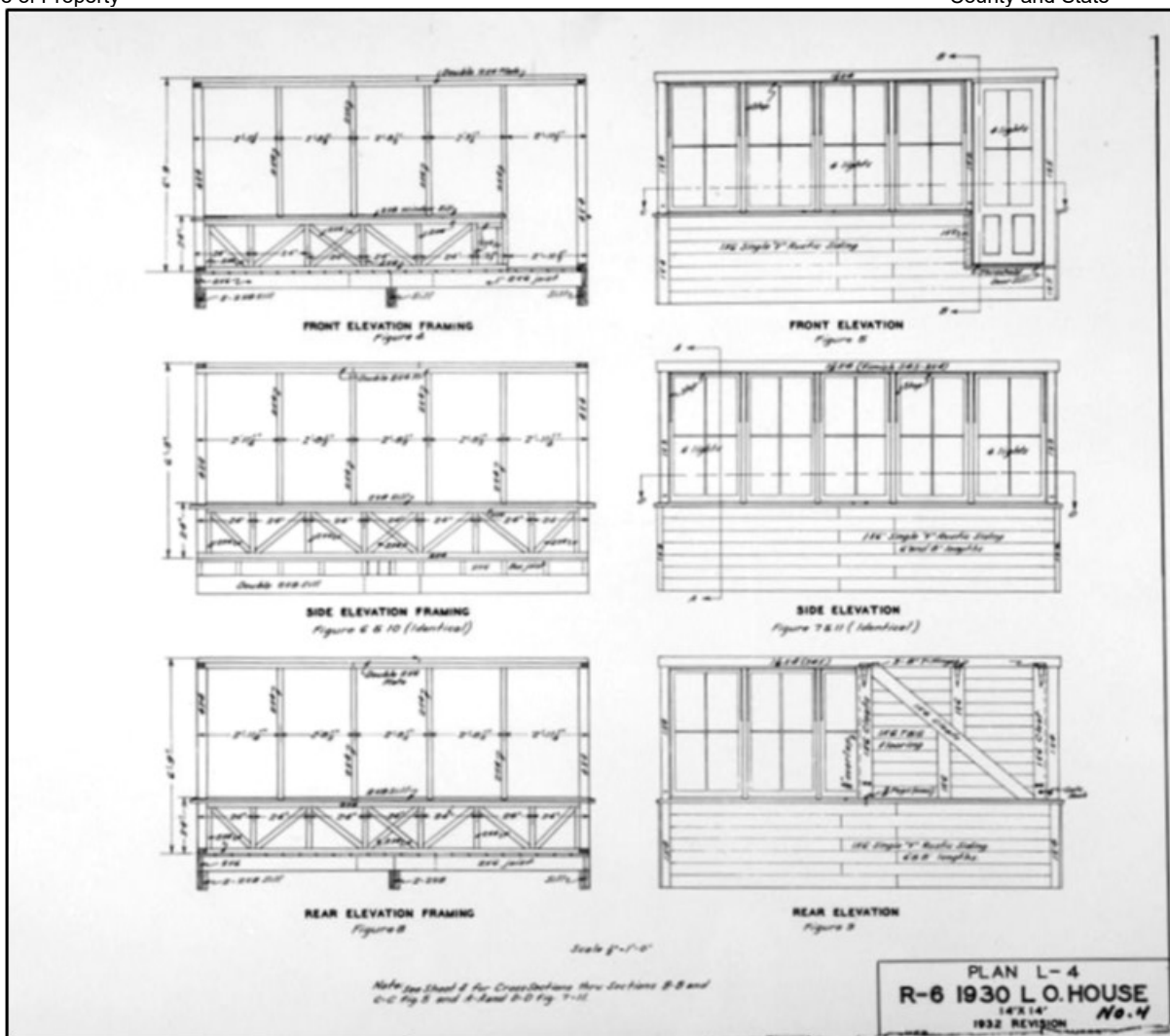
<sup>80</sup> L-4 Construction Plans retrieved from the Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey, Accessed on 8-25-2021 at <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/item/wa0287.photos.168685p/resource/>.

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Lookout House Plan L-4, Sheet 4 of 7, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower  
L-4 Construction Plan, 1932 revision



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## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

## Photo Log

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0001<br>of 20 | 0001 – Sign at picnic ground, Site 24RB2233, Looking Northwest, Rosebud County, Montana, August 26, 2021. Photographer: Tim Urbaniak.                              |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0002<br>of 20 | 0002 – Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower, Site 24RB2233, Looking Northwest, Rosebud County, Montana, August 26, 2021. Photographer: Tim Urbaniak.                 |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0003<br>of 20 | 0003 – Lookout Tower Cabin, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower, View to North, Rosebud County, Montana, August 26, 2021. Photographer: Tim Urbaniak |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0004<br>of 20 | 0004 – Lookout Tower Cabin, Site 24RB2233, View to Southwest, Rosebud County, Montana, August 26, 2021. Photographer: Tim Urbaniak.                                |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0005<br>of 20 | 0005 – Osborne Firefinder in Lookout Cabin, Site 24RB2233, View to Southwest, Rosebud County, Montana, May 17, 1999. Photographer: Tim Urbaniak.                   |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0006<br>of 20 | 0006 – Tower, Latrine, and Propane Tank, Site 24RB2233, Looking Southwest, Rosebud County, Montana, August 26, 2021. Photographer: Tim Urbaniak.                   |

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- |  |   |
|--|---|
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0007<br>of 20 | 0007 – Latrine, Site 24RB2233, Looking East, Rosebud County, Montana, August 26, 2021. Photographer: Tim Urbaniak.  |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0008<br>of 20 | 0008 – Picnic Shelter, Site 24RB2233, Looking Southwest, Rosebud County, Montana, August 26, 2021. Photographer: Tim Urbaniak.  |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0009<br>of 20 | 0009 – Picnic Tables, Site 24RB2233, Looking Northeast, Rosebud County, Montana, August 26, 2021. Photographer: Tim Urbaniak.   |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0010<br>of 20 | 0010 – Forest Officer atop Poker Jim Butte, signaling to lookout 30 miles away prior to the erection of a lookout tower, Site 24RB2233, Looking West, Rosebud County, Montana, Photo date unknown, Photographer: Custer Gallatin National Forest. |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0011<br>of 20 | 0011 – Poker Jim Ranger Station, Site 24RB2065, Direction Northeast, Rosebud County, Montana, 1910. Photographer: Custer Gallatin National Forest.  |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0012<br>of 20 | 0012 – The Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower in 1948, Site 24RB2233, View Direction Unknown, Rosebud County, Montana, 1948. Photographer: Custer Gallatin National Forest.   |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0013<br>of 20 | 0013 – The Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower with storage area present in bottom southwest corner of tower, Site 24RB2233, Looking East, Rosebud County, Montana, 1962. Photographer: Custer Gallatin National Forest.                           |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0014<br>of 20 | 0014 – Looking Southwest toward the Big Horn Mountains, Site 24RB2233, Looking Southwest, Rosebud County,   |

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Montana, May 21, 2001. Photographer:  
Tim Urbaniak.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0015<br>of 20 | 0015 – Cropped Section from Photo<br>0016, Site 24RB2233, Looking<br>Southwest, Rosebud County, Montana,<br>May 21, 2001. Photographer: Tim<br>Urbaniak.                     |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0016<br>of 20 | 0016 – Looking Northwest from atop<br>Poker Jim Butte, Site 24RB2233,<br>Looking Northwest, Rosebud County,<br>Montana, May 1, 2001. Photographer:<br>Tim Urbaniak.          |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0017<br>of 20 | 0017 – Cropped Section from Photo<br>0018, Site 24RB2233, Looking West<br>from atop Poker Jim Butte, Rosebud<br>County, Montana, May 1, 2001.<br>Photographer: Tim Urbaniak. |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0018<br>of 20 | 0018 – Looking Northeast at parched<br>landscape, Site 24RB2233, Looking<br>Northeast, Rosebud County, Montana,<br>August 26, 2021. Photographer: Tim<br>Urbaniak.           |
| MT_RosebudCounty_PokerJimButteLookoutTower_0019<br>of 20 | 0019 – Historic inscription reading<br>“Poker Jim 1879,” Site 24RB0272,<br>Looking South, Rosebud County,<br>Montana, October 19, 2017.<br>Photographer: Tim Urbaniak.       |

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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0001. Sign at picnic ground, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
August 26, 2021, View to Northwest (Urbaniak 2021)



**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0002. Lookout Tower, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
August 26, 2021, View to Northwest (Urbaniak 2021)

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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0003. Lookout Tower Cabin, Site 24RB2233,  
Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
August 26, 2021, View to North (Urbaniak 2021)



**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0004. Lookout Tower Cabin, Site 24RB2233,  
Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
August 26, 2021, View to Southwest (Urbaniak 2021)

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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0005. Looking across the Osborne Firefinder from inside the structure, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
May 17, 1999, View to Southwest (Urbaniak 1999)



**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0006. Looking Southwest from the Northeast side of the tower showing proximity of propane tank and latrine, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
August 26, 2021, View to Southwest (Urbaniak 2021)



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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0007. Looking East at the (noncontributing) latrine, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
August 26, 2021, View to East (Urbaniak 2021)



**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0008. Looking Southwest at the (noncontributing) picnic shelter and associated benches, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
August 26, 2021, View to Southwest (Urbaniak 2021)

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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0009. Looking Northeast at associated picnic benches and fire pits, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
August 26, 2021, View to Northeast (Urbaniak 2021)



**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0010. Forest Officer atop Poker Jim Butte, signaling to lookout 30 miles away prior to the erection of the lookout towers, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
Photo date unknown, View to West (B. B. Holt, Custer Gallatin National Forest 93960 (2290-49)<sup>81</sup>)

<sup>81</sup> *Custer National Forest – As it Was, 2010 Custer National Forest Retiree Reunion, PowerPoint, Custer Gallatin National Forest, 2010.*



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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0011. The Poker Jim Ranger Station, Site 24RB2065**

Photo 1910, View direction northeast (Custer Gallatin National Forest 7300-082c)

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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0012. The Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower in 1948, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**  
Photo 1948, View direction unknown (Custer Gallatin National Forest 5130-05)

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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0013. The Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower in 1962 with storage area present in bottom southwest corner of tower, Site 24RB2233, Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout Tower**

Photo 1962, View direction to the east (Custer Gallatin National Forest 5130-08)

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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0014. Looking Southwest toward the Big Horn Mountains from atop Poker Jim Butte, Site 24RB2233**  
May 21, 2001, View to Southwest (Urbaniak 2001)



**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0015. Cropped Section from Photo 0016 Looking Southwest toward the Big Horn Mountains from atop Poker Jim Butte, Site 24RB2233**

May 21, 2001, View to Southwest (Urbaniak 2001)

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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0016. Looking Northwest from atop Poker Jim Butte, Site 24RB2233,**  
May 21, 2001, View to Northwest (Urbaniak 2001)



**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0017. Cropped Section from Photo 0018 Looking West from atop Poker Jim Butte, Site 24RB2233,**  
May 21, 2001, View to west (Urbaniak 2001)



Poker Jim Butte Fire Lookout  
Name of Property

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County and State



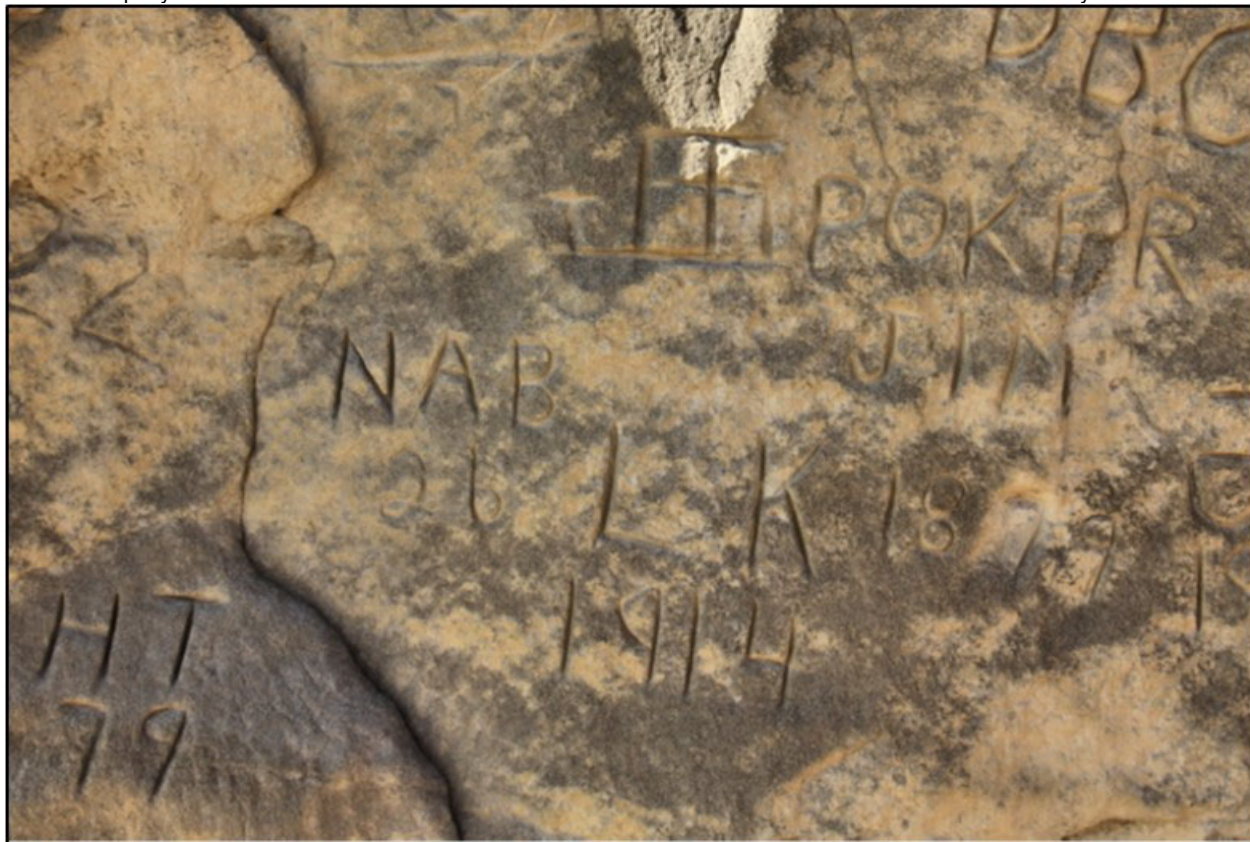
**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0018. Looking Northeast at the parched landscape of fall with smoke haze in the air, Site 24RB2233, August 26, 2021, View to Northeast (Urbaniak 2021)**

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**MT\_RosebudCounty\_PokerJimButteLookout\_0019. Looking South at the historic inscription reading “Poker Jim 1879.” Note the additional inscription of “HT 79” in the lower left. Site 24RB0272.**

October 19, 2017, View to South (Urbaniak 2017)

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.