

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: Whitetail Airway Beacon

Other names/site number: 24JF2093

Name of related multiple property listing:
Sentinels of the Airways: Montana's Airway Beacon System, 1934-1979

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

2. Location

Street & number: About 16 miles north of the community of Whitehall in Jefferson County

City or town: Whitehall State: MT County: Jefferson

Not For Publication: Vicinity: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 local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p>
<p>In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of commenting official:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Title :</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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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

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	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 2

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

TRANSPORTATION/air-related=navigational aid

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

TRANSPORTATION/air-related=navigational aid

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No Style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: METAL: Steel, CONCRETE

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.)

Summary Paragraph

The Whitetail Airway Beacon consists of one contributing resource: the nighttime airway beacon tower supporting a rotating beacon. It sits at the summit of an unnamed mountain overlooking the Whitetail Valley and Little Whitetail Creek about sixteen miles north of the community of Whitehall in Jefferson County. The beacon is accessed via a branch of Hay Canyon Road, in turn accessed from Montana Secondary 399 (Whitetail Road). The beacon is accessible by foot from the terminus of the road after a steep climb. The beacon sits on land owned by the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and when in operation, was maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation's Aeronautics Division. Erected in 1935, the beacon served as part of an historic system of lighted beacons that provided guidance to aircraft pilots as they flew north and south across Montana at night. A component of the National Parks Airway route between Salt Lake City and Great Falls, Montana, the Whitetail Airway Beacon functioned as a critical part of the route in Montana. A metal-framed platform with a wood deck surmounts the 25-foot steel tower and provides access to the revolving beacon at the top. Formerly powered by a gasoline-fueled generator, the beacon was later connected to a transmission line. Because of fire concerns, however, the power line was removed in 2018; the beacon is currently dark. The generator and fuel tank were removed from the site sometime after 1946. The beacon retains a

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high level of all aspects of integrity including the unchanged setting since the beacon's construction in 1935.

Narrative Description

The Whitetail Airway Beacon sits atop an unnamed mountain at an elevation of 6,189 feet. It overlooks Little Whitetail Creek and the Whitetail Valley to the east and the foothills bordering Hay Creek to the south. The Elkhorn Mountains stretch to the north and south of the beacon with Bull Mountain dominating the view scape to the east. A dirt road lies to the west, but direct vehicular access is not possible. The vantage of the Whitetail Airway Beacon features spectacular views of the Whitetail Valley and the Jefferson River valley to the south along with views of the Elkhorn Mountains to the north and south. The property occupies a half-acre of land managed by the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest on which MDT has held a Special Use Permit since 1935.¹

Whitetail Airway Beacon Tower (one contributing structure)

The Whitetail Airway Beacon consists of a beacon surmounted on a steel tower at an elevation of 6,194 feet. The 25-foot tower, likely fabricated by the Jones & McLaughlin Steel Company, is comprised of angle sections bolted at the connections, and measures 5-foot 10-inch square at the base with each corner resting on a buried concrete footing. A single steel guy cable attaches to the northwest corner of the tower at approximately two-thirds of its height. The tower tapers to 2 x 2 feet at its top and supports a 7 x 7-foot wood platform on which the beacon rests. A narrow steel ladder attaches to the east elevation of the tower and extends to the platform; a steel cable ascends vertically with the ladder. An opening in the platform floor provides access at the top of the ladder. An angle section railing approximately, 4 feet in height, encloses the platform and a lightning rod projects from its northwest corner. All tower elements are painted silver, the platform and beacon elements are painted orange.

The revolving beacon sits atop a steel pedestal that houses the wiring. A Lexan dome, that replaced the original glass dome, encloses the beacon. The Montana Aeronautics Division upgraded the beacon with a pulse start lamp kit in 2011. Two 500-watt lights, one each located on the north and south sides of the platform, face outward, corresponding with the air route's directionality.

A small electrical circuit box situated on the west side of the platform attaches to the inside of the safety railing. A second larger circuit box that measures 27½ x 39½ x 8 inches, attaches to the interior of the west tower leg. It has been painted orange and secured with a padlock.

The main generator, backup generator, their respective houses, and fuel tank have been removed. There is also no obvious evidence of a warming shed.

¹ File. Whitetail Airway Beacon. Aeronautics Division. Montana Department of Transportation. Helena, MT.

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Integrity

The Whitetail Airway Beacon retains a high level of integrity. The beacon tower stands at its original location and the isolation of the property provides for a strong sense of integrity of feeling, setting, and association. The beacon tower stands virtually as when constructed and much of the original equipment of the tower remains; its past routine maintenance allows for its future operation, if conditions allow. Its relationship to the Homestake Airway Beacon also continues. The beacon tower displays the effects of its siting in a completely exposed location. Despite the tell-tale signs of temperature extremes, periods of heavy snow, and strong winds, however, it continues to demonstrate sound integrity of workmanship, design, and materials. The wood platform that supports the beacon is unusual in that platforms on other beacons in Montana are steel. There have been no significant changes to the tower and beacon since its installation in late 1935.

Although the main generator, backup generator, fuel tank, and generator shed originally associated with the beacon have been removed, their loss does not compromise the significance of the property as their loss represents the introduction of newer technology to power the beacon, part of the evolution of the property.

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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.)

TRANSPORTATION
ENGINEERING

Period of Significance

1935-1979

Significant Dates

1935, 1979

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

U.S. Dept. of Commerce's Bureau of Air Commerce
Art Hadfield, US Bureau of Air Commerce/ 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 Whitetail Airway Beacon is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its role in Montana's aviation history, particularly the safe navigation of aircraft across western Montana since 1935. The property is also eligible for listing under Criterion C as representative of the specific technology available at the time of its construction allowing for nighttime navigation. While currently dark, the Whitetail Airway Beacon represents one of a small number of airway beacons that still function, or are capable of functioning in Montana and the United States.

The Period of Significance starts when the beacon began operation in 1935. In 1965, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the successor to the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA), began review of the utility of the 39 beacons it operated in Montana. After its review, the FAA retained eight beacons. Twelve others were soon to transfer out of Federal control to the Montana Aeronautics Commission. In January 1966, Charles Lynch, Director of the Montana Aeronautics Commission, commenced the Montana Beacon System, with the Aeronautics board deciding which twelve beacons would be selected for continuous operation.² Those twelve beacons, which included the Whitetail Airway Beacon, plus the St. Regis beacon relit in 1967, constituted the Montana Beacon System.³ The end of the period of significance, 1979, corresponds to the year the Montana Department of Transportation's (MDT) Aeronautics Division assumed responsibility for the final eight beacons previously under FAA-control, fully incorporating them into the Montana Beacon System.

The Whitetail Airway Beacon meets the Registration Requirements set forth in the *Sentinels of the Airways: Montana's Airway Beacon System, 1934-1979 Multiple Property Document* under the context *The Airway Beacon System in Montana, 1934-1979*, and the "Montana's Airway Beacons" property type. The period of significance identified for this property extends from its construction in 1935 through 1979, the year the Montana Department of Transportation's (MDT) Aeronautics Division assumed responsibility for the beacon; it conforms to the MPD cover context period.

Criterion Consideration G

The MPS cover document justifies an extension of the period up to 1979 to recognize a significant point in the operation and management of the airway beacon system. The period extends only briefly into the less than 50-year period and represents a logical termination point for the historic period.

² Brenda J. Spivey, "Airway Beacons, an Integral Part of Montana's Night VFR Navigational History: Past History, Present Service and Present Value," (Master's Thesis, Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, 1995), pp. 10-11.

³ Two beacons at Bozeman Pass and Boulder Hill were decommissioned in 1982.

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

The Whitetail Airway Beacon is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A as a significant component of an historic air travel corridor in western Montana. The beacon and its associated resources detail the federal development of the country's airway transportation corridors from 1935 to 1940. Between 1926 and 1940, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Air Commerce created 18,000 miles of airway corridors in the United States and installed 1,550 airway beacons marking the corridors for night flying. The establishment of the airway corridors signaled a profound event in the evolution of the nation's air transportation system, allowing nighttime commercial and airmail flight across the United States. The Whitetail Airway Beacon served as an important component of the federally-designated National Parks Airway route.

The US Department of Commerce established the National Parks Airway in 1928. The airway provided a designated air mail and passenger route from Salt Lake City northward to Great Falls, Montana.⁴

The Whitetail Airway Beacon also demonstrates significance under Criterion C as a rare, formerly operating, example of the airway beacons designed and built by the federal government from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s. The FAA decommissioned most of the national airway beacon system in the 1960s due to obsolescence. Montana, however, retained many of its beacons, with most remaining operational until 2017. The Whitetail Airway Beacon represents the standard federal airway beacon design utilized between 1925 and 1940. The beacon tower remains intact with no changes to its design. Although replaced in 2011 with an updated lamp, the beacon light surmounting the top of the tower continued, until its recent decommissioning, to function in its historic capacity; no changes occurred to the course lights on the tower.⁵

Whitetail Airway Beacon

The Whitetail Airway Beacon was part of National Parks Airway (NPA) route. Pilot and entrepreneur Al Frank established the airmail and passenger carrier in Salt Lake City in February 1928. The airline began service to Montana in May 1928 over an airway route that stretched from Salt Lake City to Helena. Indeed, the National Parks Airway was Montana's first designated airway, eventually connecting Great Falls to Salt Lake City, via Monida Pass, Dillon, Butte, and Helena. The US Department of Commerce's Air Branch officially designated the National Parks Airway in 1930. The airline was based in Salt Lake City and provided the only

⁴ The number of airway beacons in the United States peaked in 1937 at 22,319. Correspondence, Mike Rogan, Montana Aeronautics Division, September 3, 2013.

⁵ E-mail communication with Mike Rogan, Montana Aeronautics Division, November 27, 2013.

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north-south connections in Montana until 1939 when the Civil Aeronautics Authority approved the Inland Airway route from Cheyenne, Wyoming to Great Falls.⁶

The Bureau of Air Commerce completed and activated a lighted airway route from Salt Lake City to Monida Pass on the Montana-Idaho border by late 1934. Shortly after the completion of the airway to the border, the bureau began its initial surveys, by air, for the sites of ten more beacons between the community of Dell and the Helena Municipal Airport. The bureau's final ground survey of the chosen sites wasn't completed until late September 1935; work on the installation of the towers began in early October. The project also included improvements and lighting of intermediate airfields between Dell and Helena. True to the overall concept of the airway route, each beacon stood fifteen miles apart with the airfields in between also lighted. Work crews had installed three of the ten beacons by the first week of November. Air Commerce work crews, under the supervision of Art Hadfield, completed installation of the beacons between Butte and Helena by late December 1935.⁷

With the lighting of the beacons between Dell and Helena, the Butte *Montana Standard* reported just before Christmas 1935 that at Whitehall:

Installation of air beacons and lighting of the emergency landing field was completed this week with the result that Whitehall is surrounded by beacons. From one place can be observed the Whitetail beacon on the north, the Homestake beacon on the west and to the south the landing field beacon.⁸

By the mid-1940s, the CAA divided the beacons into districts for maintenance purposes. The Whitetail Airway Beacon was included with Homestake, Cardwell, Silver Bow, Galen, and Deer Lodge. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Whitetail beacon no longer operated. Its remoteness prevented regular maintenance of the lamp and trees had fallen across the transmission line providing power to the beacon. Consequently, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest declared the power line a fire hazard. The Montana Department of Transportation's Aeronautics Division cut power to the line and Northwestern Energy removed 800 ft. of line to the beacon in 2018.⁹

⁶ Wyoming Air Service changed its name to Inland Air Lines in July 1938. Under Wyoming Air Service, the company had been flying the Cheyenne to Great Falls route since 1931. "Airlines will Change Name July 1," *The Great Falls Tribune*, June 30, 1938; "National Parks Airways begins 8th Year Service," *The Deseret News*, August 1, 1935; "National Parks to Have Beacons from This City to Dell," *The Helena Independent*, September 26, 1935; "Will Use Five Planes on New Airmail Line," *The Billings Gazette*, February 29, 1928; Frank W. Wiley, *Montana and the Sky: Beginning of Aviation in the Land of Shining Mountains*, (Helena: Montana Aeronautics Commission, 1966), 277, 279; "Air Passenger Service Opens Here Monday," *The Billings Gazette*, April 14, 1931.

⁷ "National Parks to Have Beacons from This City to Dell," *The Helena Independent*, September 26, 1935; "Additional Beacons are Now Installed," *The Helena Independent*, November 3, 1935; "Officials Seek Air Beacon Sites," *The Montana Standard*, March 18, 1935; "Installation of Beacon Lights on Dell to Helena Airway Route," *The Montana Standard*, September 25, 1935; "Lights Installed on Airway Line," *The Montana Standard*, November 5, 1935; "Plan to Complete Route of Beacons in Winter Season," *The Montana Standard*, November 12, 1935.

⁸ "Whitehall Surrounded by Air Beacon Lights," *The Montana Standard*, December 22, 1935.

⁹ Frank Quinn, "CAA Maintenance Men Perform a Vital Job in Caring for Airways Beacon Lights," *The Montana Standard*, November 17, 1946; Whitetail Airway Beacon File, Montana Department of Transportation's Aeronautics Division, Helena, Montana.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

“Additional Beacons are Now Installed.” *The Helena Independent*, November 3, 1935.

File. Whitetail Airway Beacon. Aeronautics Division. Montana Department of Transportation.
Helena, MT.

“First Night Airmail Trip Made from Butte to Helena.” *The Montana Standard*, December 21,
1935.

“Installation of Beacon Lights on Dell to Helena Airway Route.” *The Montana Standard*,
September 25, 1935.

“Lights Installed on Airway Line.” *The Montana Standard*, November 5, 1935.

“Lights on Dell to Helena Airway Route Starts Soon.” *The Montana Standard*, September 25,
1935.

“National Parks Airways begins 8th Year Service.” *The Deseret News*, 1 August 1935.

“National Parks to Have Beacons from This City to Dell.” *The Helena Independent*, September
26, 1935.

“Officials Seek Air Beacon Sites.” *The Montana Standard*, March 18, 1935.

“Plan to Complete Route of Beacons in Winter Season.” *The Montana Standard*, November 12,
1935.

Quinn, Frank. “CAA Maintenance Men Perform a Vital Job in Caring for Airways Beacon
Lights.” *The Montana Standard*, November 17, 1946.

Spivey, Brenda J. “Airway Beacons, an Integral Part of Montana’s Night VFR Navigational
History: Past History, Present Service and Present Value.” Master’s Thesis, Embry Riddle
Aeronautical University, 1995.

“Whitehall Surrounded by Air Beacon Lights,” *The Montana Standard*, December 22, 1935.

Wiley, Frank W. *Montana and the Sky: Beginning of Aviation in the Land of Shining Mountains*.
Helena: Montana Aeronautics Commission, 1966.

“Will Use Five Planes on New Airmail Line.” *The Billings Gazette*, February 29, 1928.

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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: Montana Department of Transportation

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one acre

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS 84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 46.079820 Longitude: -112.140050

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

The Whitetail Airway Beacon stands in Jefferson County, Montana in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 19, T4N, R4W. The beacon site measures 50 ft. x 50 ft. encompassing the beacon tower. The beacon is situated at the top of an unnamed mountain that dominates the local view shed and occupies a parcel on Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest land.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The beacon site occupies a total of less than one acre that includes the historic beacon tower.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Jon Axline/Historian
organization: Montana Department of Transportation
street & number: 2701 Prospect Avenue
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59620
e-mail jaxline@mt.gov
telephone: (406) 444-6258
date: April 30, 2019

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Property Owner (land):

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
street & number 420 Barrett Street telephone (406) 683-3900
city or town Dillon state MT zip code 59725

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.)

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. 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, All Photographs:

Name of Property: Whitetail Airway Beacon
City or Vicinity: Whitehall vicinity
County: Jefferson State: MT
Photographer: Mitzi Rossillon
Date Photographed: October 2018

Please See Continuation Sheets

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications 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.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

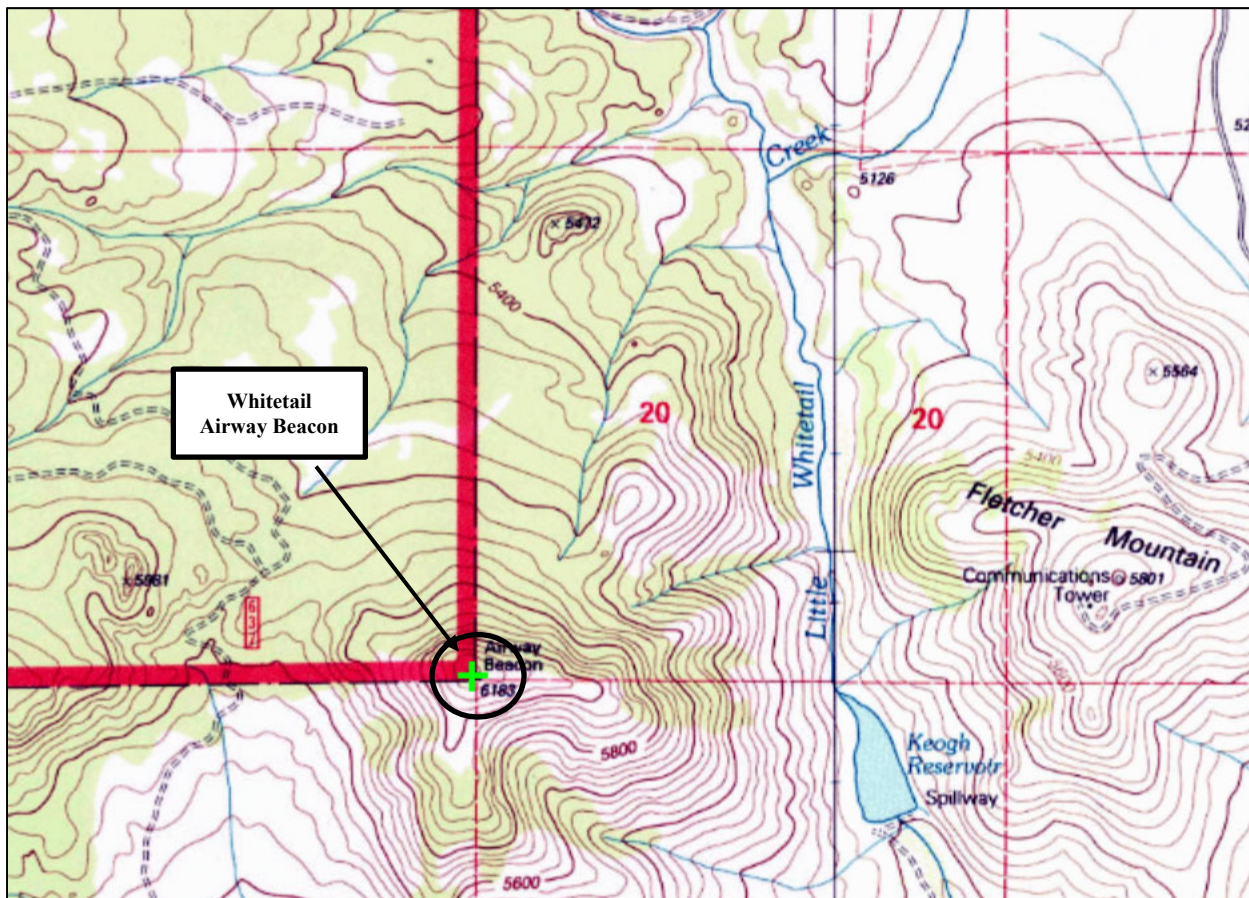
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Location of Whitetail Airway Beacon. Found on the Ratio Mountain, Montana, 7.5 ' topographic map, 1985.

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Google Earth aerial photograph showing the Whitetail Airway Beacon.

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Photo Log, All Photographs:

Name of Property: Whitetail Airway Beacon
City or Vicinity: Whitehall vicinity
County: Jefferson State: MT
Photographer: Mitzi Rossillon
Date Photographed: October 2018



MT_JeffersonCounty_WhitetailAirwayBeacon_#0001: View to the North.

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MT_JeffersonCounty_WhitetailAirwayBeacon_#0002: View to the South-southwest.

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MT_JeffersonCounty_WhitetailAirwayBeacon_#0003: View to the South.

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MT_JeffersonCounty_WhitetailAirwayBeacon_#0004: View to the West-southwest.

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MT_JeffersonCounty_WhitetailAirwayBeacon_#0006. View to the Northeast.

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MT_JeffersonCounty_WhitetailAirwayBeacon_#0007: Tower base. View to the North.