

**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: St. Regis Airway Beacon

Other names/site number: 24MN0418

Name of related multiple property listing:
Sentinels of the Airways: Montana's Historic Nighttime Airway Beacon System, 1934-1979
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: Two Miles Southeast of St. Regis

City or town: St. Regis State: MT County: Mineral

Not For Publication: Vicinity: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>MT State Historic Preservation Officer</p> <hr/> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title: Date</p> <hr/> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	
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<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p> <hr/> <p>Signature of commenting official: Date</p> <p>MT State Historic Preservation Officer</p> <hr/> <p>Title : 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	
<u>2</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

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; WOOD; 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 St. Regis Airway Beacon sits at an elevation of 4,277 feet on a mountain within the Bitterroot Range of the Rocky Mountains on land leased from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). The beacon overlooks the Clark Fork River and valley, Interstate 90, and old US Highway 10. The community of St. Regis lies about two miles northwest of the beacon. The beacon is accessed from 4-Mile Road and then climbs the mountain via a two-track dirt road over a series of switchbacks passing through the forested mountainside. The property occupies 0.3 acres of DNRC land that the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has held a Land Use License since at least 2011.

Narrative Description

The St. Regis Airway Beacon property consists of three features: the St. Regis Airway Beacon tower, electronics building, and a warming shed.

St. Regis Airway Beacon Tower (one contributing structure)

The steel tower is comprised of steel angle sections riveted at the connections and stands 55 feet in height. It measures 9 feet by 9 feet at the base, with each corner resting on a concrete footing. The tower tapers to 4 feet by 4 feet at its top and supports a steel grate platform. The International Derrick & Equipment Company of Columbus, Ohio fabricated the tower. A narrow steel ladder with arched metal safety rings attaches to the north elevation of the tower and extends to the platform where the beacon is situated; a steel cable ascends vertically with the

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ladder. A steel angle section railing, approximately 4 feet in height, encloses the 6-foot by 6-foot steel grate platform. A trap door on the platform's northeast side provides access at the top of the ladder. The revolving beacon sits atop a steel pedestal that houses the wiring. A Lexan dome, which replaced the original glass dome, encloses the beacon. Smaller 500-watt lights located on the southeast and northwest sides of the platform face outward, corresponding with the air route's directionality. An electrical circuit box situated on the west of the southwest side of the platform attaches to the safety railing. A vertical lightning rod projects from the northwest corner of the platform. Two recent antennas project horizontally from the southeast and northwest sides of the platform. Steel cable "guys" attach to each of the four corners at approximately two-thirds of the tower's height. The Montana Aeronautics Division upgraded the beacon with a pulse start lamp kit in 2011.

Electronics Building (one contributing building)

The electronics building is situated about 10 feet south-southeast of the beacon tower. Although the exact date of construction remains unknown, the Montana Aeronautics Commission constructed the building in the mid-1950s. The building originally held the electronic circuit boards that operated the revolving beacon and navigation lights, but now houses the equipment for the operation of the repeaters attached to the tower.

The building footprint measures approximately 10 feet by 12 feet and bears a concrete slab foundation and walls comprised of concrete blocks. A shallow gable roof with wood soffits and sheathed in corrugated metal covers the building. A rudimentary Dutch-door is in the west wall.

Warming Shed (one contributing building)

An 8-foot by 10-foot warming shed, likely constructed in the 1940s, sits approximately 125 feet north and downhill of the beacon tower. The building sits on a stone foundation and the walls display rustic drop-lap siding with corner boards. A wood-paneled man door appears in the south wall. The west wall holds a wood six-lite, hopper-type window. The interior features a drop-down wood table that functions as an interior wood shutter when closed. The interior also sports a fir floor and a wood pallet for a bed.¹

Integrity

The St. Regis Airway Beacon retains a high level of integrity. The beacon tower and warming shed stand at their original locations.² Although the electronics building is a later addition to the property, it originally served toward the operation of the beacon. The isolation of the property high in the mountains provides for a strong sense of integrity of location, feeling, setting, and association. The property's relation to U.S. Highway 10 and nearby St. Regis remains unchanged

¹ Warming sheds were apparently built in the years immediately after World War II. They provided a haven for the beacon maintenance crews in adverse weather. The warming sheds contained a table, bed, and a wood stove. Occasionally, the stoves were stolen from the sheds. The wood stove is no longer present in this warming shed.

² Evidence suggests that the St. Regis Airway Beacon was not originally served by a self-starting generator as were other airway beacons on the route. Instead, it was directly hooked up to a power line when erected in 1935 (see below).

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from the historic period. The beacon tower stands virtually the same as when constructed. The beacon now functions as a platform for antennas maintained by the MDT's Communications Bureau. The original beacon pedestal and light dome still sit atop the platform, and the course lights remain. MDT continues to actively maintain the tower and associated warming shed and electronics building. The Tower's relationship to the Lookout Pass (24MN0417) and Alberton (24MO1724) beacons endures. Both the beacon tower and warming shed, and to a lesser degree the concrete block electronics shed, display the effects of their siting in a completely exposed location. Despite the tell-tale signs of temperature extremes and often ceaseless wind, all easily demonstrate sound integrity of workmanship, design, and materials. The warming shed, moreover, still contains the distinctive table that also functioned as a shutter, and the bed pallet.

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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

1935-1965
1967-1979

Significant Dates

1935, 1967

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

US Dept. of Commerce's Bureau of Air Commerce
Henry Kirchner & Alvin Wilkinson/builders

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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 St. Regis Airway Beacon is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its role in aviation history, particularly the safe nighttime navigation of commercial and private aircraft across western Montana beginning in 1935. The property is also eligible for listing under Criterion C as representative of the specific technology available at the time of its construction that allowed nighttime navigation over the towering Bitterroot Mountains.

The property features two periods of significance due to it being decommissioned for a single year in the mid-1960s. The earliest period of significance began with the initial operation of the beacon in 1935 and continued to 1965, when the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) transferred ownership of 12 still-functioning airway beacons to the Montana Aeronautics Commission (MAC), including the St. Regis beacon. The FAA continued to maintain eight other beacons. At that time, 22 beacons, including St. Regis, were turned off, but left in place. The second period of significance began in 1967 when the aeronautics commission recommissioned the St. Regis beacon and turned it back on, and ended in 1979 when the Montana Department of Transportation's Aeronautics Division assumed responsibility for the final eight beacons previously under FAA-control, and fully incorporated them into the Montana Beacon System. The beacon continued to serve nighttime navigation of commercial and private aircraft until 2017. At that time, the MDT's Communications Bureau began using the structure and associated warming shed as a platform for its radio repeater equipment.³

Although not operating, the St. Regis Airway Beacon continues to be routinely maintained and now also supports more recent radio repeater equipment.⁴ The warming shed that provided shelter to technicians servicing the beacon during inclement weather, and the electronics building that originally housed the electronic circuit boards, stand nearby.

The St. Regis 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 *Airway Beacons in Montana, 1934-1979*, and the *Montana's Airway Beacons* property type. Two periods of significance for this property conform to the MPD cover context period and include: the first period from its construction in 1935 and to its brief decommissioning in 1965, and the second period from 1967 to 1979 when the federal government formally turned over operation of the remaining eight beacons under their control in Montana to the Montana Aeronautics Commission.

³ Brenda 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.

⁴ In 2018, MDT's Communications Bureau assumed responsibility for the tower. While the beacon no longer functions, the equipment is intact and will remain a vital part of the tower. The bureau has installed communications repeaters on the tower and will continue to maintain it.

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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.

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

The St. Regis 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 St. Regis Airway Beacon and its associated resources illustrate the federal development of the country's airway transportation corridors with its nascent beginnings in 1926. Between 1926 and 1938, 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 to mark 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. The St. Regis Beacon served as an important component of the federal Northern Transcontinental Airway Route between New York City and Seattle, Washington. Established in 1934, the route provided important air connections along the northern tier of states. The federal government authorized Northwest Airlines to utilize the route between Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota and Seattle in 1934. Northwest Airlines flew both mail and passengers along the airway.⁵

The St. Regis Airway Beacon also demonstrates significance under Criterion C as a representative example of the airway beacons designed and built by the federal government beginning in the 1930s. The Federal Aviation Administration decommissioned most of the national airway beacon system in 1965 due to obsolescence. Montana, however, retained most of its beacons, and 17 remained operational until 2017.⁶ The beacon found near St. Regis represents the standard federal airway beacon design utilized between 1931 and 1937. The beacon tower remains intact with no changes to its design. Although a pulse kit replaced the original bulb in 2011, the beacon continued to function in its historic capacity until 2017; no changes occurred to the course lights on the tower.⁷ The warming shed was built in the late 1940s, remains standing and virtually unchanged, and, like the tower, functions in its original capacity. The later-constructed electrical building no longer houses the electronic circuit boards of the beacon but remains in its original location on the property.

In Montana, construction of the beacons along the Northern Transcontinental Airway began in the winter of 1934 and ended in November 1935 with the lighting of the last beacon on MacDonald Pass west of Helena. The installation of 11 airway beacons between the Idaho border and Helena marked this major east-west route on the west side of the Continental Divide. Until

⁵ The number of airway beacons in the United States peaked in 1937 at 22,319. Correspondence, Mike Rogan, Montana Aeronautics Division, September 3, 2013.

⁶ Nine of the operational beacons are located on the old Northern Transcontinental Airway route.

⁷ E-mail communication with Mike Rogan, Montana Aeronautics Division, November 27, 2013.

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recently, the Montana Aeronautics Division of the Montana Department of Transportation operated and maintained 17 airway beacons in the mountainous regions of western and central Montana, including the St. Regis Beacon.

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Constructed in 1935, the St. Regis Airway Beacon represents the standard Bureau of Air Commerce design at the time. The International Derrick & Equipment Company fabricated the metal components of the 55-foot tower, which weighs 4,200 pounds. The St. Regis Airway Beacon displays the standard grated platform with angle steel guardrails and originally featured a rotating beacon housed within a 20-inch glass dome. The 24-inch mirror rotated at six revolutions per minute and projected a two-million candlepower beam of light every 1/10th of a second. The platform also included red course lights that flashed a Morse code signal, identifying the beacon to pilots.

Around 1945, the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) built wood frame warming sheds adjacent to the airway beacons, including at St. Regis, to provide a place for the maintenance technician to seek shelter and spend the night in case of inclement weather. The CAA equipped each warming shed with a wood stove, bed, and small desk.

In 1965, the FAA transferred ownership of 12 still-functioning airway beacons to the MAC but continued to maintain eight beacons in Montana. St. Regis Airway Beacon and 21 others were turned off but left in place. In 1967, despite initially being excluded from the beacons identified by the MAC for maintaining, the aeronautics commission recommissioned the St. Regis beacon and turned it back on for service.⁸

Until 2017, the St. Regis beacon continued to flash a steady “dash, dash, dot” to airplane pilots with the “red light when approaching the beacon straight into the light beam [showing] the pilot that he was on course.”⁹ The beacon is a relic of past Montana aviation history that represents an important phase in the evolution of aviation in the United States. For almost 80 years it provided a navigable airline corridor and reassurance to hundreds of pilots who continue to fly over the Bitterroot Mountains.

⁸ Spivey, *Airway Beacons*, p. 11.

⁹ “New Program Helps Montanans,” *The Helena Independent Record*, October 28, 1965; “Montana Beacons Bring Memories of Days Long Past,” *Rocky Mountain Intercom*, May 25, 1979. pp. 1-2.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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

“Montana Beacons Bring Memories of Days Long Past.” *Rocky Mountain Intercom*. May 25, 1979.

“New Program Helps Montanans.” *The Independent Record*. October 28, 1965.

Rogan, Mike. Montana Aeronautics Division, personal communication with Jon Axline, September 3, 2013; November 27, 2013.

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.

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: Environmental Bureau, Montana Department of Transportation

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.3

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. St. Regis Airway Beacon = | Latitude 47.287192 | Longitude. -115.050533, |
| 2. Electrical building = | Latitude 47.287107 | Longitude -115.050499, |
| 3. Warming shed = | Latitude 47.287501 | Longitude -115.050425. |

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

The St. Regis Airway Beacon is in Mineral County, Montana in the SW¹/₄ SW¹/₄ of Section 28 of T18N, R27W. The NR boundary encompasses an area measuring approximately 200 feet x 50 feet. Three features are associated with the property, the St. Regis Airway Beacon, a warming shed, and an electrical building. The beacon, warming shed, and electrical building stand near the crest of an unnamed mountain overlooking the Clark Fork River Valley. The beacon occupies a 0.3-acre parcel on land leased from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). The site includes all features associated with the operation of the beacon from 1935 through 2017. The individual resource locations are: St. Regis Airway Beacon = Lat. 47.287192 Long. -115.050533, Electrical building = Lat. 47.287107 Long. -115.050499, Warming shed = Lat. 47.287501 Long. -115.050425. Reference to the aerial map on page 16 of "Additional Documentation" confirms the resource locations and the NR boundary.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary is drawn based on the metes and bounds described in the November 23, 2011 Land Use License No. 3063293 between the Montana Department of Transportation's Aeronautics Division and the DNRC. The boundary encompasses the beacon tower, warming shed, and electrical building all associated with the operation of the beacon. The Land Use License describes the boundary as: "Section 28, 18N, R27W NW¹/₄ SW¹/₄ SW¹/₄, .3 acres plus access road."

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: July 26, 2021

Property Owner (Beacon):

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

name Montana Department of Transportation/Communications Bureau
street & number 2701 Prospect Avenue telephone (406) 444-6200
city or town Helena state MT zip code 59620-1001

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Land Owner:

name Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
street & number P.O. Box 201601 telephone (406) 444-6200
city or town Helena state MT zip code 59620-1601

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

Photo Log

Name of Property: St. Regis Airway Beacon
City or Vicinity: St. Regis vicinity
County: Mineral State: MT
Photographer: Janene Caywood
Date Photographed: September 2019

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of ____.

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.).

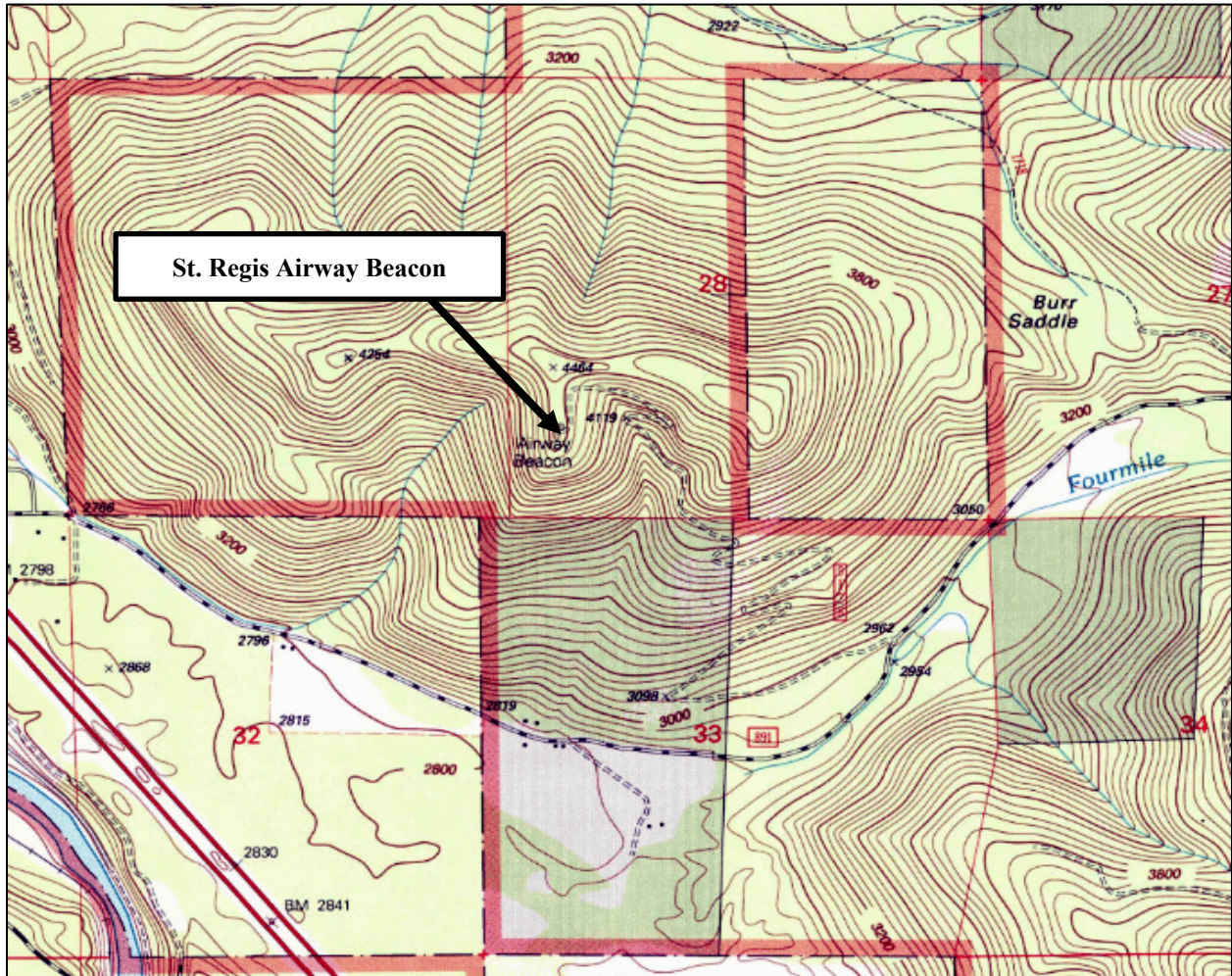
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form 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 St. Regis Airway Beacon. Found on the St. Regis, Montana, 7.5' Provisional Edition topographic map, 1999. SW¼ SW¼ of Section 28, T18N, R27W. Individual Resources: St. Regis Airway Beacon = Lat. 47.287192 Long. -115.050533, Electrical building = Lat. 47.287107 Long. -115.050499, Warming shed = Lat. 47.287501 Long. -115.050425

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Location of St. Regis Airway Beacon, electrical shed, and warming shed, aerial view.
Electrical building = Lat. 47.287107 Long. -115.050499
St. Regis Airway Beacon = Lat. 47.287192 Long. -115.050533
Warming shed = Lat. 47.287501 Long. -115.050425

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MT_MineralCounty_StRegisAirwayBeacon_0001. Overview. View to the northwest.

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MT_MineralCounty_StRegisAirwayBeacon_0002. View to the northwest.

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MTMineralCounty_St.RegisAirwayBeacon_0003. View to the northwest.

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MT_MineralCounty_StRegisAirwayBeacon_0004. Detail of base and warning sign. View to the northwest.

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MT_MineralCounty_StRegisAirwayBeacon_0005. Warming shed. South side. View to the north.

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MT_MineralCounty_StRegisAirwayBeacon_0006. Warming shed. West side. View to the east.

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MT_MineralCounty_StRegisAirwayBeacon_0007. Interior of warming shed. Detail of drop-down table and window.

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MT_MineralCounty_StRegisAirwayBeacon_0008. Electrical shed. West and south sides. View to the northeast.