



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Intermountain  
Region

324 25th Street  
Ogden, UT 84401-2310

File Code: 1950/4060-3

Date: APR - 9 1999

Dear Research Natural Area Process Participant:

Enclosed is a copy of the Decision Notice and Designation Order for establishment of four Research Natural Areas (RNA's) and two Special Interest Areas (SIA's) on the Bridger-Teton National Forest. Also enclosed are maps and a copy of the Forest Plan amendment.

This decision amends the Bridger-Teton Forest Plan to change the status of the: Afton Front RNA; Swift Creek RNA; Gros Ventre (formerly Horse Creek) RNA; and Osborn Mountain RNA from "proposed" to "established" Research Natural Areas. Kendall Warm Springs SIA and Big Fall Creek SIA are designated as Special Interest Areas. These are non-significant amendments to the Forest Plan (36 CFR 219.10(f)). Establishment records for each RNA and SIA will now be finalized.

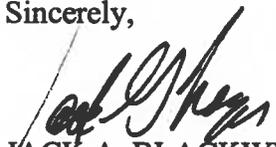
Thank you for participating in the process to establish these Research Natural Areas. The wide range of information and comments we have received during this analysis have helped me reach a richly informed decision that will provide for the long-term recognition and protection of these representative ecosystems.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217.3. A written appeal must be postmarked or received in duplicate by the Appeal Reviewing Officer within 45 days of the publication of the legal notice of this decision in the *Casper Star-Tribune* newspaper. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 217.9, with two copies mailed to:

USDA-Forest Service  
ATTN: EMC Appeals Staff, 3C  
PO Box 96090  
Washington, DC 20090-6090

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Alma Winward, Regional Ecologist, at 801-625-5596.

Sincerely,

  
for JACK A. BLACKWELL  
Regional Forester

Enclosures



**Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact  
And  
Designation Order**

**DESIGNATION OF FOUR RESEARCH NATURAL AREAS  
And  
TWO SPECIAL INTEREST AREAS**

**BRIDGER-TETON NATIONAL FOREST  
TETON, SUBLETTE and LINCOLN COUNTIES, WYOMING**

**April 1999**

By virtue of the authority delegated to me by the Chief of the Forest Service, it is my decision to establish four Research Natural Areas (RNAs) and two Special Interest Areas (SIAs) listed on the enclosed table. The establishment of these Research Natural Areas was recommended in the Bridger-Teton Forest Plan. This decision will change the status of the Afton Front, Swift Creek, Gros Ventre (formerly identified as Horse Creek), and Osborn Mountain areas from "proposed" or "candidate" to "established." Further, it is my decision to establish two Special Interest Areas: the Kendall Warm Springs area and the Big Fall Creek Geologic Area. Those recommendations were the result of an analysis of the factors listed in the Forest Planning Regulations at 36 CFR 219.25 and Forest Service Manual 4063.41. Results of the analysis are documented in the Forest Plans and Final Environmental Impact Statements.

Based on the analysis in the environmental assessment, I have decided to establish four RNAs and two SIAs as proposed in Alternative C. The enclosed Table and maps show the established research natural areas and boundaries. Alternative C is selected because it provides long-term protection and recognition of these representative, relatively undisturbed places. These six areas will be managed in compliance with all relevant laws, regulations, and Forest Service Manual direction regarding RNAs and SIAs, and in accordance with the management direction in the Bridger-Teton Forest Plan and individual establishment records for each area.

Three alternatives were displayed in the environmental assessment: do not establish RNAs or SIAs (no action); establish the RNAs as proposed (Alternative B); or establish the RNAs and SIAs as proposed (Alternative C). Each proposed research natural area and special interest area was considered individually. The plant community types found in the four RNAs will contribute to the overall representation goals in the national RNA system. These four RNAs will also contribute to the regional and national network of natural community types and will encourage monitoring and research use. The two SIAs do not meet the criteria for RNAs, but designation as SIAs will protect the unique flora, geologic and hydrologic features found in these areas and Kendall Warm Springs provides habitat for the Kendall Warm Springs dace, a sensitive fish species in the Intermountain Region.

The Bridger-Teton Forest Plan is hereby amended to establish four RNAs (Afton Front, Swift Creek, Gros Ventre and Osborn Mountain) and two SIAs (Kendall Warm Springs and Big Fall Creek). These are non-significant amendments to the Forest Plan (36 CFR 219.10(f)) because they are limited in location and size and do not affect ability to achieve any goals and objectives. Establishment records for each RNA will now be finalized.

The environmental assessment prepared for the designation of the four proposed RNAs and two SIAs was released for public review June 8, 1998. Copies of the Environmental Assessment were mailed to interested and affected agencies, organizations, and individuals. Responses were received, and the comment period was extended until October of 1998 at the request of local land users.

Four letters were received in response to the environmental assessment. The comments in these letters have been summarized and are addressed as follows:

Two letters were in support of RNA and SIA establishment as stated in Alternative C of the EA. They stated that the Bridger-Teton National Forest "has a responsibility to protect land for the under-represented plant communities that are featured in these proposed RNA and SIA areas."

One comment pertained to motor vehicle use in RNAs or SIAs outside of Wilderness.

**Response:** Motor vehicle use will be restricted to established roads or trails within RNAs or SIAs and, in following national direction for Wilderness, will be completely restricted from RNAs within designated Wilderness.

Another letter voiced support for the two SIAs but stated skepticism on the necessity of RNAs. It asked that existing recreations uses not be changed within RNAs. **Response:** Recreation uses are not planned to be changed in the RNAs.

Finally, one of the letters also pointed out discrepancies in the EA pertaining to prescribed fire and recreation use. It states that a prescribed burn is not a natural process and should not be allowed in RNAs or SIAs. **Response:** a prescribed natural fire is a naturally occurring (e.g. lightning caused) fire in an area previously analyzed in a Prescribed Natural Burn Plan. The outcome of that plan may state that a wildfire would need to be contained within a certain drainage or boundary or could be allowed to burn naturally, within specific guidelines.

This same letter, in reference to recreation use, quotes, "...Prohibit any recreational use if such use threatens or interferes with the objectives or purposes of which the RNA is established." The comment here pertains to skepticism that current recreational uses will continue. **Response:** Current recreational uses of the RNAs and SIAs have been at low levels that have not affected the RNA or SIA values. Continued low levels of use will not be precluded or modified by this Decision Notice. If increased levels of use threaten a given area, appropriate natural resource management will be considered to retain pristine conditions within an RNA or SIA. Any future decisions would be analyzed with full public disclosure and involvement, as has been done with this analysis and decision.

The RNAs are in areas that have received few uses in the past, this is why they are valued for research natural areas, and this designation will provide for their protection for the future. The acres within the four RNAs and two SIAs constitute less than 1% (about 0.4%) of the total acres on the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

I have determined through the Environmental Assessment that the proposed action is not a major Federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This determination is based on the following factors:

A. Context

Although this is an addition to the national system of research natural areas and special interest areas, both short-term and long-term physical and biological effects are limited to the local areas.

B. Intensity

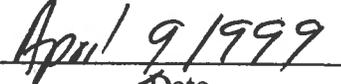
1. There are no known effects on public health and safety.
2. There are no known effects on historic or cultural resources, actual or eligible National Register or Historic Places sites, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas.
3. Effects on the human environment were disclosed in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and are further described in the response to the comments received on the EA. These effects do not involve unique or unknown risks, and are not highly controversial.
4. The action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects.
5. The environmental consequences of establishing the research natural areas in general are described in the environmental impact statements for the Forest Plans. The cumulative effects of this land allocation across the Bridger-Teton have been considered and disclosed in the EA. Less than one percent (about 0.4%) of the total Bridger-Teton National Forest System Lands are now designated as research natural areas and special interest areas.
6. The proposed action does not adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.
7. The proposed action is consistent with Federal, State, and local laws and requirements for the protection of the environment.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217.3. A written appeal must be postmarked or received in duplicate by the Appeal Reviewing Officer within 45 days of the legal notice of this decision. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 217.9 and two copies must be mailed to:

USDA - Forest Service  
ATTN: EMC Appeals Staff, 3C  
P.O. Box 96090  
Washington, D.C. 20090-6090

Questions regarding these research natural areas and special interest areas may be directed to Dr. Alma Winward, Regional Ecologist at 801-625-5596.

  
for JACK A. BLACKWELL  
Regional Forester

  
Date

## DECISION TABLE

### DESIGNATED RESEARCH NATURAL AREAS and SPECIAL INTEREST AREAS

#### BRIDGER-TETON NATIONAL FOREST

April 1999

Research Natural Area	MAP #	FEATURES
<b>Afton Front</b> 715 Acres Greys River Ranger District Lincoln County	1	Coniferous forest, shrubland and sagebrush grassland plant communities represent a large sample of the community variation in the Salt River Range and serve as an important repository of native biological diversity.
<b>Swift Creek</b> 4170 Acres Greys River Ranger District Lincoln County	2	<u>Picea engelmannii</u> / <u>Galium triflorum</u> , <u>Abies lasiocarpa</u> / <u>Acer glabrum</u> and <u>A. lasiocarpa</u> / <u>Ribes montigenum</u> ( <u>R. montigenum</u> phase) community types. Also protects several under-represented tall forb and riparian community types, including: <u>Ligusticum filicinum</u> ; <u>Heracleum lanatum</u> ; <u>Salix boothii</u> / <u>Maianthemum stellatum</u> ; <u>Mertensia cilata</u> ; and <u>Arnica longifolia</u> community types.
<b>Gros Ventre</b> 6565 Acres Jackson Ranger District Teton County	3	<u>Pinus albicaulis</u> / <u>Vaccinium scoparium</u> , <u>Abies lasiocarpa</u> / <u>Vaccinium globulare</u> , and <u>A. lasiocarpa</u> / <u>Actaea rubra</u> community types as well as the <u>Populus tremuloides</u> /tall forb type. Also represents several riparian community types.
<b>Osborn Mountain</b> 2830 Acres Pinedale Ranger District Sublette County	4	Alpine fellfield, meadow and turf, and alpine riparian (small ponds and <u>Carex scopulorum</u> - <u>Caltha leptosepala</u> ) community types.

Special Interest Area	MAP #	FEATURES
<b>Kendall Warm Springs</b> 160 Acres Pinedale Ranger District Sublette County	5	Unusual and highly threatened biological values. Represents rare species and riparian communities of the warm springs, such as the Kendall Warm Springs Dace.
<b>Big Fall Creek</b> 640 Acres Kemmerer Ranger District Sublette & Lincoln Counties.	6	Unusual geologic, hydrologic and biologic features. Represents thermal features, rare species and unusual plant communities.

## AMENDMENT #5

### BRIDGER-TETON NATIONAL FOREST LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

APRIL 1999

The Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) was approved on March 2, 1990. Changes affecting the Bridger-Teton National Forest since that time have required periodic amendments to the Forest Plan to keep it current. This amendment pertains to Research Natural Areas and Special Interest Areas within the Forest. In April 1999 the Regional Forester established the Afton Front, Swift Creek, Gros Ventre and Osborn Mountain Research Natural Areas (RNAs) and the Kendall Warm Springs and Big Fall Creek Special Interest Areas (SIAs), requiring the following changes in the Forest Plan:

#### CHANGE #1

Chapter 2, Research Natural Areas section (page 49 of the Forest Plan): Replace the paragraph with:

**"The Bridger-Teton National Forest established four Research Natural Areas and two Special Interest Areas in April 1999. The following areas were found suitable and have been established as Research Natural Areas (RNAs): Afton Front RNA; Swift Creek RNA; Gros Ventre RNA (previously Horse Creek Proposed RNA; name changed to avoid duplication in the National RNA network); and Osborn Mountain RNA. Kendall Warm Springs and Big Fall Creek have been established as Special Interest Areas (SIAs)."**

#### CHANGES #2

Chapter 4, Community Interest and Management Areas. Change and add each research natural area and special interest area to the "Special Features" paragraph as follows:

page 255 (Bridger Wilderness) - delete "proposed" from the **Osborne Mountain Research Natural Area** because this area has now been formally established.

page 277 (Community Interest Area 3 -- Jackson and Management Area 41 -- Jackson Hole South) - change "Horse Creek Proposed" to **Gros Ventre Research Natural Area** in the list of "Special Features".

page 287 (Community Interest Area 4 -- Pinedale and Management Area 72 -- Upper Green River) - identify **Kendall Warm Springs** as a **Special Interest Area**.

page 301 (Community Interest Area 6 -- Afton Front and Management Area 33 -- Star Valley North) - delete "proposed" from the **Swift Creek Research Natural Area** and **Afton Front Research Natural Area** because these areas have now been formally established.

page 317 (Community Interest Area 8 -- Kemmerer and Management Area 12 -- LaBarge Creek) - add **Big Fall Creek** as a **Special Interest Area**.

### CHANGES #3

Chapter 6 - Index - Special Features (pages 357 and 358). Make the following changes and additions:

page 357 - delete "Proposed" from **Afton Front Research Natural Area (MA 33)** ...  
(pages) **49,301**

- change "Horse Creek Proposed" to **Gros Ventre Research Natural Area (MA 41)** ... (pages) **49,277**

- add **Big Fall Creek Special Interest Area (MA 12)** ... (pages) **49,317**

page 358 - add **Special Interest Area** to **Kendall Warm Springs (MA 72)** ... (pages)  
**49,287**

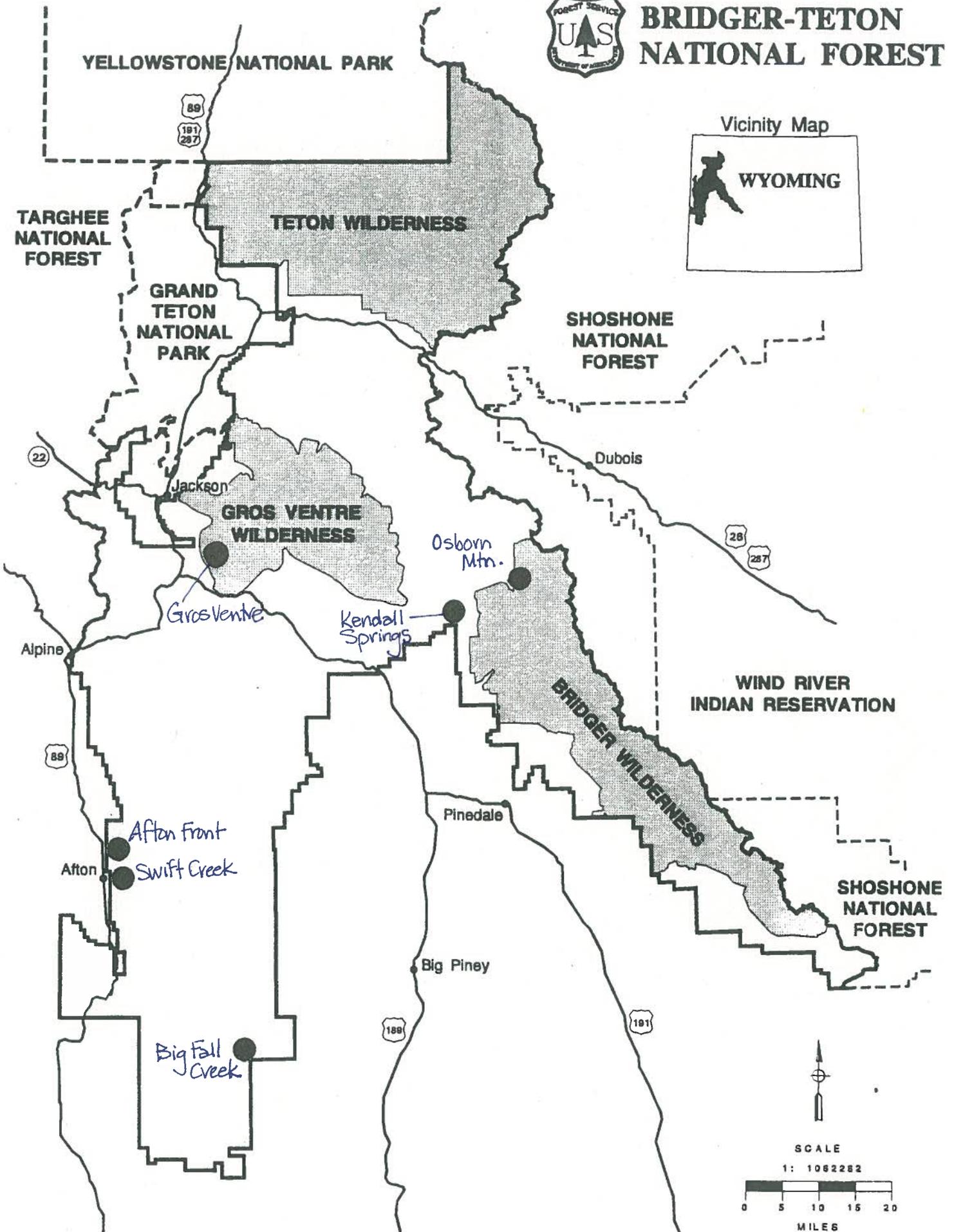
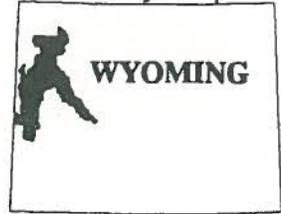
- delete "Proposed" from **Swift Creek Research Natural Area (MA 33)** ...  
(pages) **49,301**

- delete "Proposed" from **Osborne Mountain Research Natural Area (Bridger)**  
... (pages) **49,255**



# BRIDGER-TETON NATIONAL FOREST

Vicinity Map



SCALE

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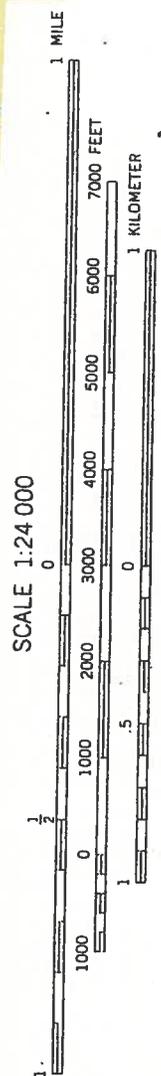
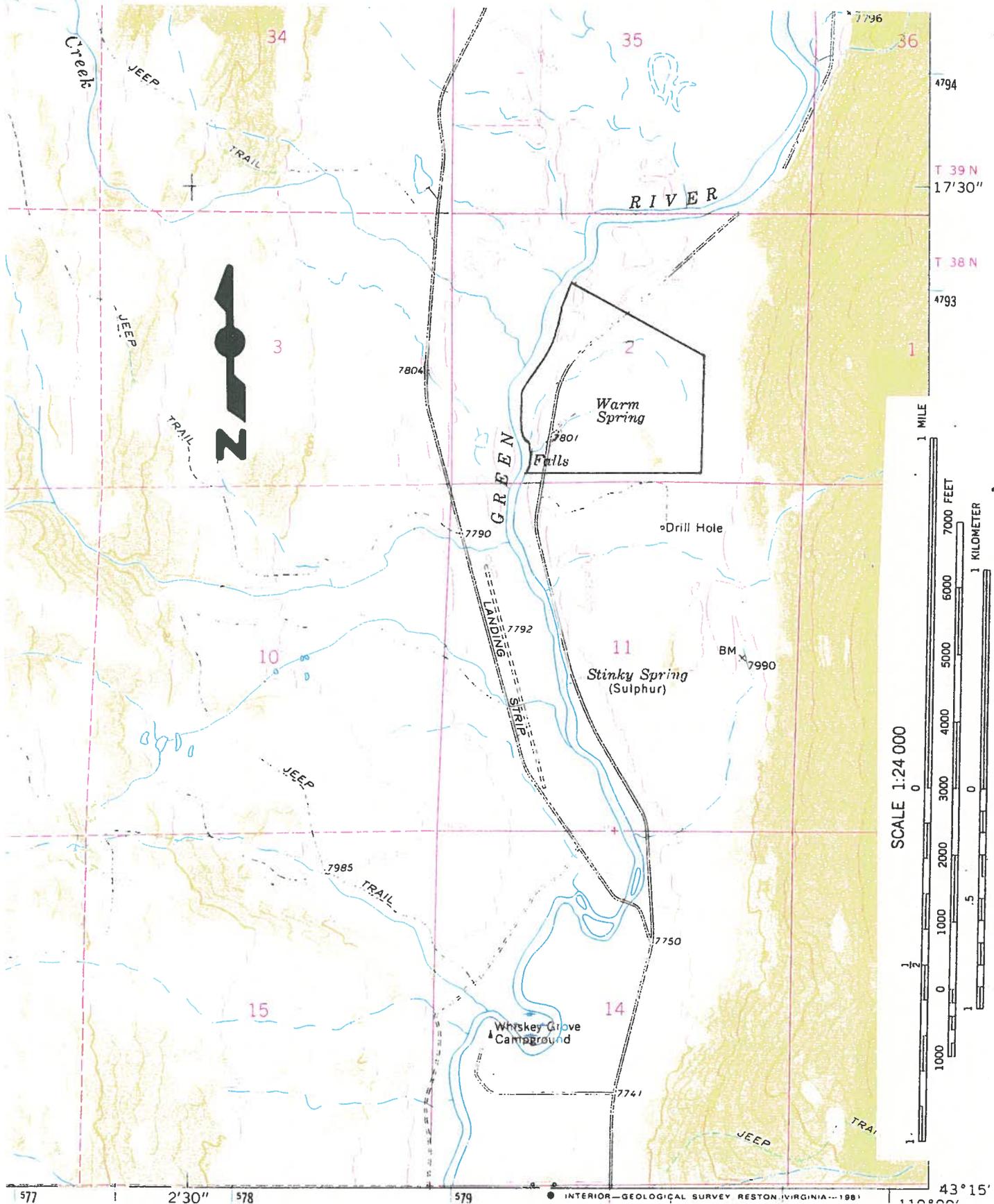
MILES





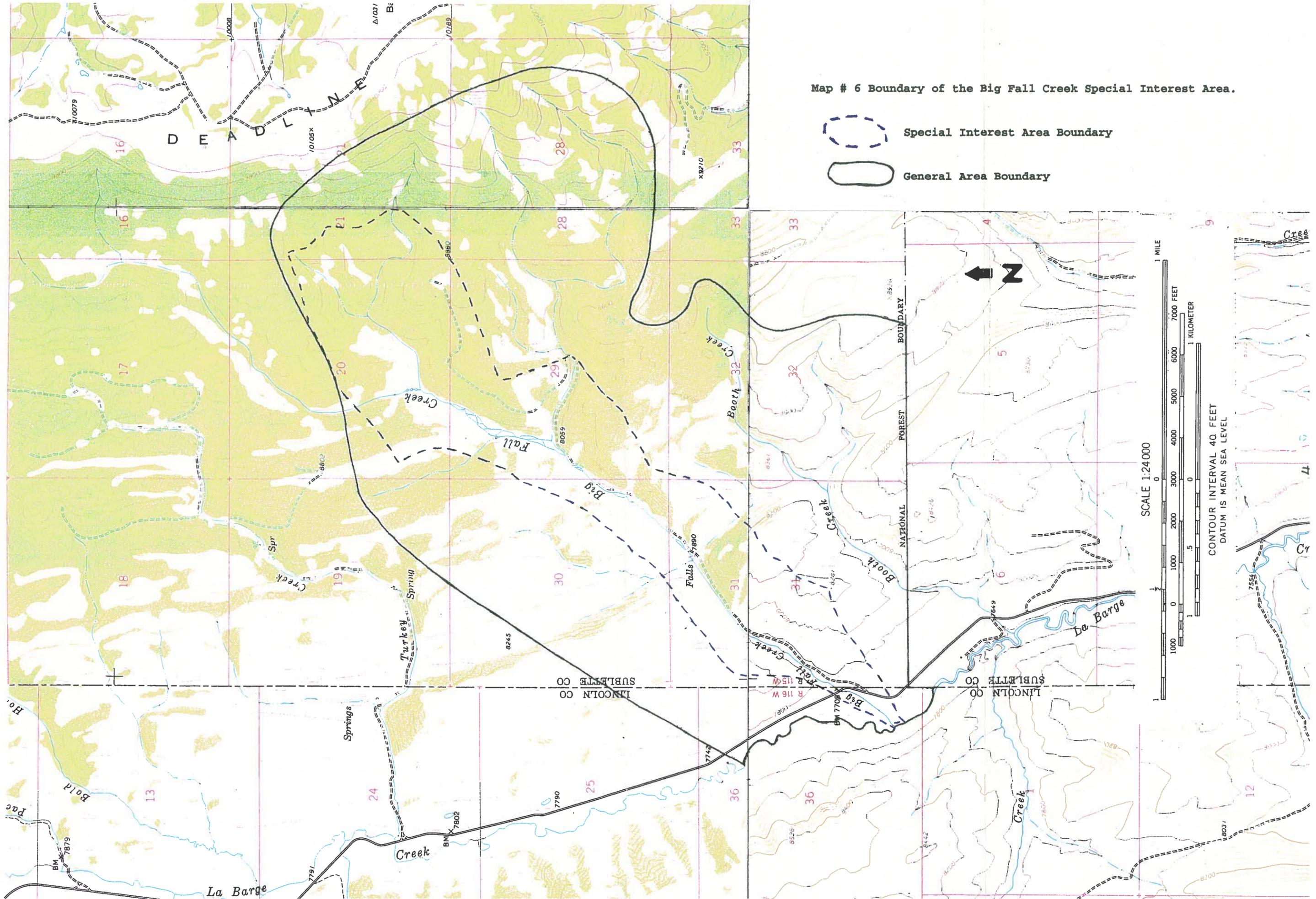
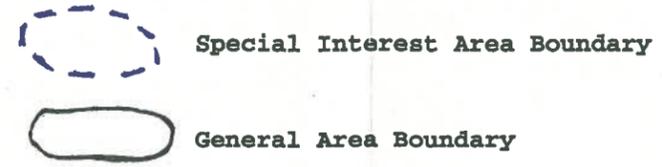


Map # 5 Location and boundary of the Kendall Warm Springs Special Interest Area.

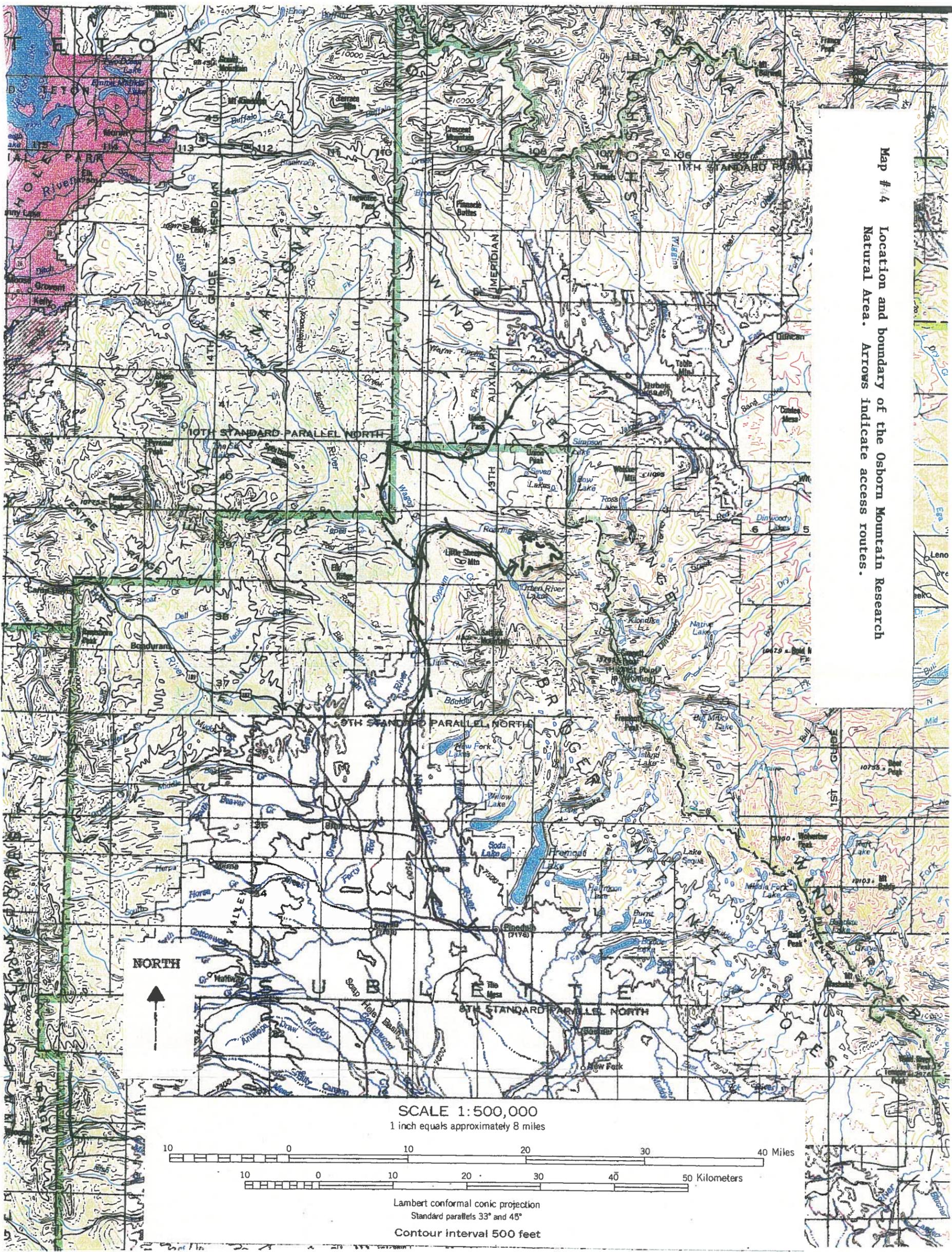


CONTOUR INTERVAL 40 FEET  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

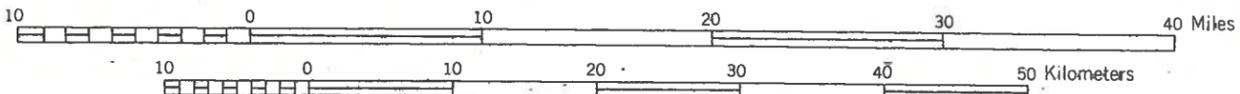
Map # 6 Boundary of the Big Fall Creek Special Interest Area.



Map # 4 Location and boundary of the Osborn Mountain Research Natural Area. Arrows indicate access routes.



SCALE 1:500,000  
1 inch equals approximately 8 miles



Lambert conformal conic projection  
Standard parallels 33° and 45°  
Contour interval 500 feet