

Center for the Sawtooths General Design Narrative Obsidian, Idaho

December 2024

Background

In the summer of 2024, The Sawtooth Interpretive & Historical Association (SIHA) received a gift of 6.7 acres in the Sawtooth Valley, in Custer County Idaho. The previous owners of the property donated it to SIHA to benefit local organizations that are dedicated to the preservation and protection of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA) and the visitors and local residents they serve.

SIHA is a 501(c)(3) Idaho based nonprofit organization dedicated to *protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage of Idaho's Sawtooth country through preservation and education.*

For decades in the past, this property had been a commercial business called Sessions Lodge. It included a convenience store, restaurant, gift shop, motel, public restrooms and showers, gas station, RV spaces and hookups, and several small storage buildings and garages. More recently the property was used for employee housing for the donors Sawtooth Valley businesses. Most of the buildings on the property were not constructed on site but were moved from elsewhere in the Sawtooth Valley.

The RV hookups were removed in 2002. The underground fuel tanks and pumps were removed in 2023. Since acquiring the property SIHA has demolished or removed five small buildings, including the public restroom and showers and some storage sheds. The property was also inspected and treated for noxious weeds in 2024.

The future uses of the property are constrained (see below) by a donation agreement that was signed and recorded in 2023, and by a Scenic Easement that was purchased by the United States of America in 2002. Both documents are recorded with the Custer County Clerk in Challis, Idaho.

The purpose of this General Design Narrative is to detail the plans SIHA has for this property that we are now calling *The Center for the Sawtooths (CeSaw)*.

Vision

SIHA's vision is to create a public education center in the Sawtooth Valley that supports the preservation and protection of the SNRA, provides up-to-date recreation and other information to SNRA visitors, provides interpretive and other educational programs, provides a home for area nonprofits (housing and office/event space), teaches and promotes responsible recreation and land-use practices, and is an asset to the local community and economy.

- **Visitor Resource** – The center will provide area information and resources directly to visitors. Environmental Education and Leave-No-Trace and other wildland training classes will be offered here. Trip planning assistance will also be available. An onsite bookstore will provide visitors with area books, maps, and other resources.

- **Education Center** – The center will be an accessible facility, with the purpose of deepening people’s connection to the SNRA. It will be a place where community and non-profit organizations can offer an expanded menu of educational programming. It will include public restrooms, exhibits, classroom space, an information desk, and information on area recreation opportunities and visitor service businesses. *Eventually we would like to provide an EV charging station.*
- **A home for nonprofits** – The center will be a place where nonprofits, working together to further the purposes of the SNRA, can collaborate to maximize their effectiveness. SIHA intends to provide office and meeting space for nonprofit organizations, seasonal and eventually year-round staff and employee housing, speaker/presenter lodging, and space where nonprofits can securely store equipment and tools.
- **Community Asset** – The center will be available to the public and the community. It will be a mid-valley resource, offering space for meetings and gatherings. The center will offer workforce housing (identified as the most critical need for economic and community stability on the SNRA during the *Sawtooth Vision 20/20* collaborative planning efforts that were undertaken by community members in 2006 and 2016).

How the Center for the Sawtooths will be developed

The development of the property will be a multi-year project that will proceed in phases as funding is secured.

Initial work will emphasize providing seasonal housing for SIHA employees, SIHA office space, cleaning up the site, and long-term planning.

Ultimately, the CeSaw site will feature a reduced number of structures on the west side of the property; from ten to six: two garage/storage structures, one expanded housing structure, one new housing structure, one meeting/classroom facility, and one education center. These structures are discussed in more detail below.

We intend to develop the property using sustainable products and green building principles whenever possible.

Limitations on the use of the property

The Donation Agreement and the Scenic Easement each limit how the property may be used and developed:

- **From the Donation Agreement**
 - SIHA will rent housing only to staff and employees of educational, governmental, or nonprofit entities.
 - The property is to be used as a resource to further the preservation, protection, and enhancement of the SNRA.
- **From the Scenic Easement**
 - Subdivision of the property, by sale or lease, is prohibited.
 - Residential trailers, mobile homes, and manufactured or modular homes are prohibited.
 - Development (i.e., building construction) may only occur on the 3.26 acres of the property west of the irrigation ditch that bisects the property.
 - The aggregate allowable building capacity for the property is 13,000 square feet of building footprint (excluding outside decks). Currently the aggregate building footprint is 6,170 square feet.

- No new or remodeled building may exceed 3,500 square feet of building footprint, nor exceed 4,500 square feet of total internal floor space.
- All buildings on the property must conform to the following design criteria:
 - Shall not exceed twenty-four feet in height above the natural ground level.
 - Windows will be rectangular or square, and no more than twenty-five square feet in size. Windows visible from highway 75 must encompass less than 30 percent of any exterior wall surface area.
 - Buildings may only be comprised of rectangular square shapes with no more than three ridgelines, excluding dormers. Geodesic domes, prow walls, and round exterior rooms are not allowed. Designs must reflect a history of traditional and common use prior to 1940 within the Sawtooth Valley/Stanley Basin.
 - Siding will be log, log-sided, rough-sawn lumber, wood siding, board and batten, or wood substitute.
 - Roofs will be wood, composite, or non-reflective metal.
 - Nighttime exterior lights will be shielded downward and will not exceed 150 watts. Shielding will cover an area three times the size of the light source and be constructed of natural wood or other non-reflective material. (Note: each existing building has a specific number of exterior lights that are permitted, ranging from one to ten).
 - Vegetative screening may be required to screen buildings from Highway 75.
 - Landscaping will incorporate native species.
 - All new utilities will be underground.
- All changes in use of the property and/or construction or reconstruction of any improvements must receive written approval of the SNRA Area Ranger prior to implementation. (This includes signage and exterior colors of all structures).

Details of design elements for each building

New housing unit (to replace the old motel (35-37*)): The old motel includes three separate buildings connected to each other by an outside deck and a single roof structure. It includes a two-bedroom apartment on the south end, a former gift shop on the north end with six motel rooms, and a common kitchen area in between. The current footprint of the building is 2,568 feet. The easement allows 2,600 square feet, and 1,100 square feet of external deck.

We will replace the existing building(s) with a new employee housing structure that will occupy a 3,500 square foot footprint, and a second story of 1,000 additional square feet. This structure will be in the same location as the old motel building.

The new building for staff and seasonal housing will include:

- One two-bedroom apartment unit with a separate living area with kitchen, bath, and laundry. Approximately 600 to 700 square feet. (Partially furnished)
- Two Studio apartments with bath and kitchen. Approximately 350 to 400 square feet each. (Furnished)
- Ten 100 square foot single rooms and two 400 square foot multi-occupancy rooms with communal kitchen, laundry, and bath. (Furnished)
- Communal kitchen, laundry and bath and storage areas will total 700 square feet.

- A communal room with couches, TV, tables, and chairs with a designated dining area and storage. Approximately 500 square feet.
 - Total square footage of this building will be 4,300 to 4,500.

As an interim housing unit, the existing motel building could be upgraded and repaired to improve plumbing, electrical, mechanical, appliances, etc. This would require staying within the current footprint of approximately 2,600 sq ft. and include:

- One two-bedroom apartment unit on the south end of the building of approximately 400 square feet.
- Six single rooms with individual bathrooms and a communal kitchen and laundry. Each room and the kitchen are approximately 310 sq ft but will vary slightly in size.
 - Total square footage is 2,600.

New housing unit: A new housing unit will be added to the western portion of the property, near the location of the old motel unit. It will be similar to the new employee housing structure described above: 3,500 square feet of building footprint with a second story of 1,000 square feet. It may be identical to the first housing structure: one two-bedroom apartment, two studio apartments, and eight single rooms with communal spaces as described above, but size and number of units may change based on need. For planning purposes we expect this structure to mirror the first.

Center for the Sawtooth Education and Visitor Center (previously the Café (41*)): The old café building was retrofitted to provide housing for the previous owner's employees. It includes eight bedrooms, and kitchen, bath, and laundry areas. SIHA will continue to utilize the building for employee housing until one or both housing units described above are available to house its employees. The building currently occupies 1,650 square feet of footprint and has a second story that is also approximately 1,650 square feet for a total of 3,300 square feet.

Ultimately, this building will be converted to *the Center for the Sawtooth Visitor and Education Center*. The center will offer a variety of services, including information on trails, campgrounds and other amenities, area history, geology and ecology, wildlife, and fish. Trained Naturalists will staff it to help visitors understand the SNRA. Naturalists will help visitors plan their visit, and how to best appreciate, enjoy, and protect the SNRA. The center will be open seven days a week during the summer season and may eventually be open year-round. It will be a center for learning about all things SNRA, including the natural history and the human history of the area.

The Center will include:

- Public restrooms, either within the footprint or attached to it. Three unisex, ADA restrooms. Approximately 70 square feet each.
- Office and exhibit preparation space on the upper floor. There should be six workspaces in three separate offices and an open space office design for exhibit preparation in the central portion of the building. Electrical outlets, computer hook-ups, and office furniture will be provided.
- On the lower floor, exhibit space, a bookstore, information and trip planning services and desk space, classroom space, local business brochure distribution, a 3-D area map and a small work space that is not public-facing will be provided.
- The public portion (lower floor) of this building will maximize the use of natural materials and natural lighting and will feature an open floor plan.

Classroom and meeting building (previously the Convenience store (30*)): This building was recently remodeled and will not require much alteration other than the development of a restroom area. Initially it will serve as SIHA office space, and as a place for small (up to thirty people) meetings or events. The building footprint is 912 square feet.

Ultimately, this building will serve as meeting, classroom, and event space for SIHA, its partners, and the community.

Covered Outdoor Classroom: Near the culvert crossing the irrigation ditch, a pole barn style structure with an enclosed storage shed will provide space for larger classes and events. It will be approximately 20'x30' or 600 square feet.

Two garages (32, 42*): The two garages will be kept in place and used for storage of vehicles, supplies, and tools for SIHA and its partners. No alteration of these buildings is planned currently, other than cosmetic treatments and minor repairs. The garages are 465 and 375 square feet of building footprint each.

Undeveloped parcel: The 3.46 acres of the property that lies east of the canal will not have any new structures built on it per the scenic easement. Our intent for this area is to provide moveable picnic tables around the property, space for tented venues, and to build an ADA interpretive nature trail. Landscaping will utilize native plants. The area will function as an outdoor classroom and space for community events.

General: In the course of development, all overhead power lines will have been buried. We expect that the drain field and septic systems will have to be expanded. The extent of this will be determined as architectural designs are approved by the Forest Service and the County.

At build-out the building footprint on the property described in this narrative will be 10,402 sq ft. The additional 2,598 sq ft that the easement allows will be held in reserve for future development needs.

10.28.2024 - draft

***Numbers refer to the building numbers on the Scenic Easement maps.**