

30-Day Opportunity to Comment

USDA Forest Service, Sawtooth National Forest Sawtooth National Recreation Area Blaine County, Idaho T6N, R15E, Section 6.

Designation of Galena Summit Communication Site and Issuance of Communication Lease for a Co-Location Wireless Facility

Background

A special use permit issued to Sawtooth Telephone has authorized a communication building and microwave facility on Galena Summit for more than ten years. The microwave has recently been removed, but the building remains in use. While this site has been operated as a Communication Site, it was never formally designated as such in the Sawtooth Land & Resource Management Plan.

In 2003 the Forest received a proposal from Idaho Tower Company to construct two wireless telecommunication facilities on the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. One cell tower was to be placed near Galena Summit and the other near Stanley. In 2004, we requested comments on the proposal to allow construction of the two cell towers, 147 interested citizens provided comments. Since that time, the city of Stanley has been provided with cell service from another source and the Sawtooth National Recreation Area denied the proposal for the Stanley site because of access issues. Thus, the proposal has been modified to construct one cell tower only at the Galena site. There is an existing communications facility on the Galena Summit site, which has prompted the Forest to propose formally designating this site a Communication Site for this use and future proposals. This will require a non-significant amendment be added to the Sawtooth Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to:

- Formally designate the existing Sawtooth Telephone communication facility location on Galena Summit as a Communication Site. This would require a non-significant Forest Plan Amendment.
- At that same location, construct a co-location wireless communication facility (WCF) which will accommodate four cellular carriers and an equipment building

The authorization of the WCF would consist of a 90-foot tall self-supporting stealth tower that resembles an evergreen tree to house up to four cellular carriers, a one-story equipment building that would have a forest cabin facade, and fence enclosure on the Galena Communications site. Electrical power would be supplied to the building by extending an existing distribution line. The road to the site would receive maintenance before and after heavy equipment was brought in, as deemed necessary by the Forest Service. The proposed tower has received a

“Determination of No Hazard” which means that the tower will not require any lighting or marking.

The location of the existing Galena Summit communication site is just on the north side of Galena Summit and is reached by traveling ¼ mile on Forest Service Road #70405 off of Highway 75.

Purpose and Need:

1. There is a need to provide for communication site designations and developments that meet public needs and are consistent with direction for the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and National Forest resources. The Sawtooth Forest Plan directs us to work with utilities and others to identify potential areas for additional designated utility and communication facilities. This facility would provide for improved public safety by improving cell phone communication in this area.
2. There is a need to formally designate the existing communication site on Galena Summit. Sawtooth Telephone currently has a communications building on the site. The Sawtooth Forest Plan directs us to first focus on the improvement of existing facilities to accommodate expanded use rather than creating new communication sites. Since the Sawtooth Telephone site is existing, it is time to formally designate it as a communication site.

The Proposed Action and Alternatives

Alternative #1 - No Action The Forest Service would not designate Galena Summit as a Communication Site and the proposal for a wireless communications facility would not be approved. We are required to analyze the “No Action” alternative.

Alternative #2 - Proposed Action The Forest Service would designate Galena Summit as a Communication Site to allow for future proposals for the site. The proposal for a wireless communications facility including the building and tower would be approved as per the application.

Evolving issues may result in additional alternatives.

Preliminary Issues Identified

Scenic Resources:

The visual quality of the proposed action has been identified as a preliminary issue to be considered. A 90-foot stealth mono-pine tower, a structure that is designed to resemble an evergreen tree is proposed for the Galena site. The proposed tower height will be about 40 feet above the surrounding tree height. Simulated photos of the tower at different distances along the corridor are available for review by contacting the Sawtooth National Forest at (208) 737-3247.

Wildlife:

The potential for bird impacts and mortality from the proposed tower has been identified as a preliminary issue.

Impact to Canada Lynx is a preliminary issue due to necessary winter access to the site for repair and maintenance to equipment.

Wilderness:

A concern was raised over coverage in the Sawtooth Wilderness. While the goal of the proposed tower is not to provide coverage in the wilderness there may be some bleed into this area. This was not identified as a preliminary issue driving alternatives, but it is recognized as a sensitive area.

Compliance with the Sawtooth Forest Plan

Currently the Sawtooth Forest Plan refers to Galena as an “undesigned” communication site.

Lands and Special Uses –“The Bald Mountain (North), Bald Mountain (South), and Seattle Ridge designated communications sites are all located within the management area. Another undesigned communications site is located on Galena Summit.” (Forest Plan III-151)

Formally designating the existing site a “Communication Site” will require a non-significant amendment to the Sawtooth National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This action would occur for Alternatives 2 – 4.

PUBLIC INPUT – How and When to Comment on the Proposed Action:

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the Times-News newspaper. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period. Those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the regulations.

Submit written comments on issues related to the Proposed Action to:

Sawtooth National Forest
Attn: Galena Communications Site Project
2647 Kimberly Road East
Twin Falls, ID 83301-7976

Or submit comments via telephone at (208) 737-3247

Or submit comments via FAX at (208) 737-3236

Or submit comments via e-mail in a format (pdf, txt, rtf, or document compatible with Microsoft Office applications) to: comments-intermtn-sawtooth@fs.fed.us

Or you may hand-deliver your comments to two locations during normal business hours from 8:00 am to 5:00 Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays:

- Sawtooth Forest Supervisor’s Office at the address above (208-737-3247)
- Sawtooth National Recreation Area, 5 North Fork Canyon Rd., Ketchum, ID 83340

All comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

Appeal Rights

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the regulations. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following information:

1. Name and Address;
2. Title of the proposed action;
3. Specific facts or comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision;
4. Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility;
5. For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and
6. Individual members of organizations must submit their own comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual, comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Forest Plan Direction

Management Area 4 – Big Wood River Management Area Prescription 3.2

LSGO04 - Proposed special uses of National Forest System lands—such as hydroelectric development, communication sites, water developments, and utility corridors—are considered that meet public needs, are consistent with direction for other National Forest resources, and cannot be accommodated off the National Forest.

LSGO05 - Special use authorizations are issued for uses that:

- a. Serve the public,
- b. Promote public health and safety,
- c. Protect the environment, and/or
- d. Are legally mandated.

LSOB09 - Continue working with utilities and others to identify potential areas for additional designated utility and communication facilities.

LSOB10 - Provide for communication site designations and developments that meet public needs and are consistent with direction for National Forest resources.

LSST09 - Proposals for utility and communication facilities outside designated communication sites or utility and wireless technology corridors shall be considered only after improvement of existing facilities to accommodate expanded use is analyzed and determined to be unreasonable.

ST0401 -Within the Sawtooth NRA, manage both federal and private lands to ensure the preservation and protection of the natural, scenic, historic, pastoral, and fish and wildlife values and to provide for the enhancement of the associated recreational values in accordance with Public Law 92-400.

GU0495 - On National Forest System lands, development or uses should meet inventoried VQOs wherever feasible. Where the inventoried VQO of Preservation, Retention, or Partial Retention cannot be met, a reduction on one VQO constitutes “impairment”. Any activity that produces discordant elements in excess of the next lower VQO may constitute substantial impairment. This will be determined through a comparative evaluation of the dominant elements of form, line, texture, color and variable factors, such as distance and scale of the activity on the landscape. A reduction of two VQOs constitutes “substantial impairment”. Specific projects or uses may deviate from the objectives if recreation or other Sawtooth NRA values are enhanced. Mining operations may deviate if mineral objectives cannot otherwise be met. Use landscape architect guidance for all projects where deviation might occur.

Objective 04137 - Provide for continued use of existing special use authorizations as long as such uses are in the public interest within the management area. Process new special use requests within the boundaries of the Sawtooth NRA in accordance with the Sawtooth NRA policy.