



GEM COUNTY

Historic Preservation Plan



DECEMBER 2022

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ACRONYMS

- CLG – Certified Local Government
- HPC – Gem County Historic Preservation Commission
- HPP – Historic Preservation Plan
- IHSI – Idaho Historic Sites Inventory
- NHPA – National Historic Preservation Act
- NPS – National Park Service
- NRHP – National Register of Historic Places
- SHPO – State Historic Preservation Office (or Officer)

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Historic resources permeate the Idaho landscape, reflecting the evolving culture and architecture of its communities. As the state of Idaho grew in population, following the gold rush of the 19th century, settlements and sites of national significance rose from the soil. Throughout Gem County, these same resources touch everyday lives through daily routines and special visits, simultaneously providing a distinct sense of place and personal connection to the unique landscape that is southwestern Idaho. Sites like the Gem County Courthouse, the Ola school house and Oregon Short Line Railway Depot represent critical time periods that define how life in Gem County operated in the past, and how historic buildings can contribute greatly to the modern day. This document aims to celebrate the existing historic sites that make Gem County unique and inform methods of preservation that benefit present and future generations.

The Gem County Comprehensive Plan from February 2014 established a basis for the preservation of historic and cultural resources throughout Gem County, dedicating a chapter to its applicability. Its vision for Gem County links historic resources with a flourishing community saying, “We envision Gem County as a beautiful community where our history is honored, protected and preserved; a community that celebrates, respects and promotes the diversity and culture of its people and natural resources, and creates an environment where culture, arts and heritage flourish.”

The basic goals set forth in the rest of the chapter were to protect existing historic sites from destruction and alteration, utilize available financial incentives for those sites, protect the county’s prominent historic architectural character and establish a Gem County Historical Preservation Commission. A 2022 update of the comprehensive plan will honor and add to these goals in partnership with this Historic Preservation Plan. As the county has evolved, so has its understanding of the most effective avenues for achieving the 2014 vision. The Gem County Historic Preservation Plan will outline these avenues and establish how historic preservation can be a local priority.

WHAT IS HISTORIC PRESERVATION?

Historic preservation is an established discipline aimed at preserving historic, cultural, and archaeological resources for the benefit of present and future generations. It presents standards, incentives, and guidelines for how to preserve sites for the greatest benefit to the community. Historic preservation planning also provides a framework for deciding how historic resources can utilize other standards of protection, including restoration, rehabilitation, alterations, additions, and reconstruction.

Historic preservation planning has roots at the federal level. The National Park Service derived techniques and evaluation methods to define what historic resources are and how they can be best preserved. States and localities across the country have modeled their local historic preservation planning efforts off these federal practices, while satisfying the unique considerations of their geography and history. Idaho’s State Historic Preservation Plan acts as a guide for local communities like Gem County that wish to add their own unique considerations for preservation in their jurisdiction.

As Gem County embarks upon the path to prioritizing historic resources, documents like these create the opportunity for ongoing conversation and evolving methods of preservation that best serve the community over time.

PURPOSE OF THE PRESERVATION PLAN

Although planning efforts in the past have identified preservation as an important goal, Gem County has not created a document dedicated to the specifics of this goal. As a result, the desire for implementable steps and a clear vision has materialized into this Historic Preservation Plan. Its purpose is to provide a strategy for the protection and enhancement of historic resources within Gem County. These resources can include sites, buildings, structures, objects, and districts that have either national, state, or local historical or cultural significance.

Gem County's Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) was first created by ordinance in 1987 and has worked toward local preservation efforts ever since. This plan aims to strengthen the reach and impact of the existing preservation initiatives that reveal historic resources that have provided the County's foundation, while introducing new ones reflective of today's desires.

Most historic sites across the state have been found in higher population areas, due to available resources. However, rural area preservation is a crucial aspect of Idaho's collective history. Sites like historic barns, silos, granaries and more, represent Gem County's agricultural lifestyle. This plan sets the stage for sites within the rural areas of Gem County and the historic resources in Emmett to be recognized and celebrated at the local level while satisfying the SHPO's goal of encouraging long range planning efforts in more rural areas of the state.

The continued presence of preserved and recognized history in the community relies on more than policies, goals and initiatives related to preservation. The relevance and celebration of historic resources relies on widespread public support for these sites—support robust enough to prompt tangible action to preserve the physical sites when possible, and when not possible, preserve them through documentation. This plan helps to articulate the reasons for individuals and organizations to show that support for preservation efforts.

This plan is the result and documentation of the collaborative process between the Gem County community, Logan Simpson design, and Gem's Historic Preservation Commission. It will guide preservation planning for the foreseeable future, taking into consideration the best practices to promote the robust presence of historic architecture throughout the County. Gem County has the opportunity to raise consciousness about the benefits of integrated history throughout the built environment through the use of preservation conducted by the guidelines in this document.

BENEFITS OF PRESERVATION

Historic sites contribute to a lasting cultural influence reminiscent of the events and people that define the past, present, and future of an area. The robust history of Gem County is physically preserved by these sites, structures, and buildings that have intangible ties to the community. Beloved historic places are the centerpieces and physical representations of the cultural evolution and collective memory of the community. By preserving them, Gem County can weave the past, present and future into a continuous story that can be shared among generations.

The feelings and memories that one experiences at historic sites are captured and compounded with each new and returning visitor. The sites themselves provide physical spaces to feel connected to one's own past and share in the collective experiences of others. The benefits to maintaining these historic buildings as integral pieces of the architectural fabric of Gem County extend to tangible elements like economic benefits, job creation, and several more. These benefits will be explained in further detail below, however, the intangible benefits of historic places, that cannot easily be quantified, those seen and felt amongst the community, are crucial aspects to consider as well.

For simplicity, the benefits of historic preservation have been split into three categories, cultural, economic and social. These categories encompass additional areas of benefit within them and will be expanded, as this plan undergoes updates over time.

Cultural Benefits

Education

The Gem County Historic Preservation Commission has the opportunity to highlight sites with educational potential throughout the county for the benefit of residents and visitors. Often, rural places are described by what they are not, rather than what they are. For example, the Census Bureau defines rural as places that are not urban. By highlighting historic resources within rural areas like Gem County, the community can start to characterize their rurality, not by their lack of urban characteristics, but by the aspects of their area that truly define them. Heritage tourism, a practice of visiting historic sites through walking tours, school programs, publications and other methods, can be a way to represent and pass-on events and lessons from the past. It can inform the design and character of Gem County that the community wishes to carry on with new development. It can also serve as a tool to inform people about the lifestyles, important personas and significant events of the past.

Inclusion of underrepresented sites

The recognition of historic and cultural resources extends far beyond buildings. Industry, transportation, and engineering feats have been traditionally underrepresented by Idaho's listed sites but provide value, uniqueness, and education to communities. Rich agricultural and cultural resources related to farming, Native American tribal history, and other cultures and populations have also traditionally been underrepresented in NRHP listings. Idaho's past encompasses a vibrant range of experiences that can be highlighted through local historic preservation practices.

Economic Benefits

Increased Visitors

Distinctive architectural styles can define a place and attract visitors to the area. As Gem County preserves local buildings that feel essential to the landscape and character of their community, those same buildings can be shared with visitors to attract visitors and business clientele. Historic sites are the essence of many distinguishable communities, as they are unique to the location they reside. By maintaining and enhancing these sites, Gem County has the opportunity to not only celebrate the existing connections that individuals feel to Gem's history but to cultivate new experiences among visitors.

Jobs

The preservation of historic buildings can create job opportunities for local contractors, builders, consulting firms, and more. Historic buildings have unique restoration needs that can be met by local craftsman with the assistance of various financial incentives granted through federal and state level programs. The preservation of these buildings also benefits local businesses, by attracting customers. Historic preservation initiatives can make a clear case for well-maintained infrastructure while simultaneously achieving all the other benefits listed in this chapter.

Cost and Saved Resources

Preserving existing buildings and historic sites can be a wise use of resources, existing infrastructure, and tax dollars. It can encourage investment in the existing roads and utilities that serve the community rather than necessitate the creation of new infrastructure. It also reduces demand for new building materials and the greenhouse gas emissions that result from the materials undergoing international or extensive domestic travel.

Avoiding demolition of historic buildings also reduces the amount of waste that ends up in landfills. In Idaho specifically, about 25% of solid waste volume is comprised of the remains from new construction, renovation, and demolition projects. Historic preservation is a responsible choice for saving waste from local disposal while providing tangible community benefits.

Social Benefits

Aesthetic Value

The preservation of historic buildings contributes to the richness of Gem County and the way its beauty seamlessly integrates into the natural environment. The buildings and sites themselves create a strong sense of place that not only distinguishes it from neighboring communities but evokes a sense of home for the people who live there.

Historic buildings also serve as community landmarks that facilitate social interaction and cohesion. Communities like Gem County, that have an extensive land area with lower building density can find connection through their shared experiences with their environment. The agricultural lifestyle of Gem already has provided a meaningful connection among the community to the land, which is preserved

through agricultural zoning and resource protection. Historic preservation allows those same types of protections for the sites that make up the built environment on the land.

Adaptive Reuse

Historic sites provide opportunities for adaptive reuse according to the evolving needs of a community. Former churches can become community centers and school buildings can become housing. Sites that have provided concrete value to the community in the past can be reused to satisfy fundamental needs of the present day while maintaining the rich heritage and integrity of the former space.

HOW DOES PRESERVATION HAPPEN?

The preservation of historic resources occurs through both public and private actions—from property owners and developers investing in and rehabilitating historic properties, to local governments helping to promote the preservation of important historic resources and landscapes. The following section describes the preservation tools and policies that help advance preservation at the local level.

Preservation Laws, Policies and Programs

There are preservation policies at different levels that apply to Gem County, including applicable federal and state preservation laws, and the Gem County Code. These overarching federal and state laws establish the structure for the county’s preservation program, requirements for projects with federal involvement, and the consideration of historic preservation as part of the County’s Comprehensive Plan.

Federal Regulation

Federal preservation laws establish the responsibility for stewardship of our nation’s cultural and architectural heritage and provide the legal framework that supports the state and local implementation of this stewardship. Key applicable federal laws that affect historic preservation include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and the National Register of Historic Places.** The NHPA of 1966 built on two earlier measures to support historic preservation, the Antiquities Act of 1906 and the Historic Sites Act of 1935. The NHPA created the President’s Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Register of Historic Place, and the National Historic Landmarks Program, which recognizes historic resources significant in the history, architecture, archaeology, and culture of local communities, states, and the country. The National Register does not provide any level of protection to listed properties except for projects involving federal funds, licenses, or permits. The Act established the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to administer the National Register program at the state level and in Idaho, the SHPO is part of the Idaho State Historical Society.

- **Certified Local Government (CLG) Program.** In 1980, Congress amended the NHPA to implement the Certified Local Government (CLG) program, which is one way the state historic preservation offices participate in local preservation planning activities. The National Park Service and the Idaho SHPO administer the CLG program in Idaho. Communities that have committed to historic preservation can become CLGs through establishing a preservation ordinance and creating a historic preservation commission. CLG communities can receive technical assistance and grants. Gem County is a certified local government (CLG) pursuant to Idaho Code (IC 67–4601 to 4619) and the general requirements of the National Park Service (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). As a CLG, Gem County is responsible for maintaining the historic preservation commission; continuing to survey local historic properties; enforcing state or local preservation laws; reviewing National Register nominations; and providing the public with opportunities to participate in historic preservation activities.
- **The U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966** (as amended) gathered 31 different federal offices into a single Cabinet-level department. Section 4(f) of the act prohibits the Federal Highway Administration and other U.S. Department of Transportation agencies from “using land from publicly owned parks, recreation areas (including recreational trails), wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or public and private historic properties, unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative to that use and the action includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the property resulting from such a use.” (23 CFR Part 774).
- **The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969** (83 Stat. 852, 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) provides a framework for evaluating the environmental impact of federally assisted projects with the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- **The Archaeological Resource Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979** (16 U.S.C. 470aa–470mm; Public Law 96–95 and amendments to it) provides for “the protection of archaeological resources and sites which are on public lands and Indian lands, and to foster increased cooperation and exchange of information between governmental authorities, the professional archaeological community, and private individuals” (Sec. 2(4)(b)).
- **The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990** outlines the rights of Native American lineal descendants, Indian tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations related to the treatment, repatriation, and disposition of Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and cultural items. Any local government or institution receiving federal funds must comply with NAGPRA. State and local laws regulate excavations and discoveries, but NAGPRA may apply depending on who controls human remains or cultural items removed from private or state lands as a holding or collection.

Idaho State Regulation

State preservation laws support the statewide coordination and implementation of historic preservation and enable delegation of responsibilities to cities to manage and implement historic preservation at the local level. These are the key applicable Idaho statutes affecting historic preservation, but they are not a comprehensive list:

- **Title 67, Chapter 41, State Historical Society** establishes the State Historical Society to support and encourage the preservation of cultural and architectural properties statewide.
- **Title 67, Chapter 46, Preservation of Historic Sites** enables local governments to establish historic preservation commissions and local historic districts, conduct design review, and generally implement historic preservation at the local level. The legislation also empowers local communities to conduct ongoing architectural surveys, retain title and rehabilitate historic properties when necessary and warranted, as well as accept property easements and transfer of development rights. As opposed to the National Register, local preservation commissions may manage and regulate the exterior alterations of properties included within local historic districts.
- **Title 67, Chapter 65, Local Land Use Planning** enables local land use planning, zoning, and the development of plans to guide planning and decision-making. It also specifies that a comprehensive plan must identify, evaluate and consider “special areas” or “special sites”— areas, sites, or structures of historical, archaeological, architectural, ecological, wildlife, or scenic significance.

Gem County Historic Preservation Ordinance

Gem County adopted its historic preservation ordinance, Ordinance No. 87-2, on April 27, 1987, which was codified within the County Code as [Chapter 2 Historic Preservation Commission](#) under Title 2, Boards and Commissions. The ordinance establishes the desired membership of the commission, defines powers and duties of the commission, and establishes rules and procedures.

Preservation Programs and Partners

- [Idaho State Historic Preservation Office \(SHPO\)](#). Idaho SHPO manages several programs and initiatives, including the National Register of Historic Places, the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program, Certified Local Governments, and the Section 106 review and consultation process for federally funded and permitted projects impacting historic resources. SHPO staff provide educational and technical support to Idaho communities on preservation issues. The Idaho SHPO maintains the Idaho Historic Sites Inventory (IHSI), which is the permanent statewide inventory of architectural and historic properties and records historic buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts.

- [Preservation Idaho](#). Established in 1972, Preservation Idaho is the statewide non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to preserving places that are important to Idaho residents. Their work focuses on threatened sites across the state, sponsoring the adoption of a statewide historic preservation tax credit program and managing the Idaho Barns Register, which documents the state's historic barns and agricultural buildings. In addition to their advocacy work, Preservation Idaho offers educational programs, walking tours, and a preservation awards program.
- [Idaho Heritage Trust](#). Established in 1989, the Idaho Heritage Trust provides grants and technical assistance in support of bricks and mortar preservation and cultural resource management projects across Idaho. The Trust receives much of its funding through its ownership and licensing of the art incorporated on many Idaho license plates. It has funded more than 600 projects totaling over \$4.9 million in grants and technical architectural, engineering, and conservation assistance.
- [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#). The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) is the leading national nonprofit organization dedicated to historic preservation in the U.S. It has a 70-year history of saving places, advocating for national preservation policy, and assisting communities at the local level. The NTHP has financial resources available for project planning in the Preservation Fund. Grants require a committed match and competitive bids/quotes for the proposed scope of work. The grant maximum is \$5,000.

Gem County Historic Preservation Commission Efforts

1980s: Gem County was officially formed as a Certified Local Government (CLG) and the HPC was formed by Ordinance. Since its creation, the HPC members have been available to lead historic talks, tours, and demonstrations. Members of the HPC mapped the Pearl Cemetery, which is on private ground and not open to the public. The records are kept in the Gem County Museum Library for public reference. The HPC also wrote the history of the Sweet Syringa Hall and had outside signage installed.

1995: Members completed Idaho State Historic Site Assessments on many buildings in Downtown Emmett. These records are kept in the Gem County Museum Library for research resources.

2013- 2015: All members of the HPC worked with Brad Clark, Gem County Liaison and Dale Gray, a private contractor with Frontier Historical Consultants of Grand View, Idaho to complete a formal Homestead Survey. The purpose was to research location of sites and homes which were granted during the Homestead Act, to evaluate each identified structure for its potential for future Historic Site Recordation, and to evaluate each structure's potential for eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Overall, 20 pre-1890s homes were assessed, photographed, and included in an application to the National Register of Historic Places. However, none were accepted.

2015-2018: HPC members worked in various ways to help with the Sweet Syringa Hall renovation; by attending and participating in meetings, writing letters of referral and recommendations, giving

speeches and presentations, and attending events focused on the project. Through many grants, donations, fund raisers, and widespread community participation the Hall was restored and is used regularly. Sweet-Montour Syringa Club President Sharon McConnell led the project.

2019- 2022: The HPC was actively involved in helping the community of Ola renovate their local elementary school, Ola School. The members of HPC attended meetings including School Board meetings and spoke in favor of the renovation. The HPC also wrote letters to local officials in support of the school and referred the SOS group (Save Ola School) into the network of historic preservation. Some grants were written through the CLG for small school projects. Members attended most SOS activities and fund raisers and visited the school to check on the progress regularly. Today, the Ola School is in full service to the young people of Ola in Gem County.

2020: Led by member Nick Petersen, the HPC is working to make accurate historic signs for the old bridges relocated in Gem County and used in walking paths. This project is ongoing.

2021: Led by member Karen Bruner, the HPC is involved in mapping the cemetery in Sweet Idaho. This project is ongoing.

Since 2015 letters have been written in support of preserving various things in Gem County from the Steam run Corliss at the old site of Boise Cascade Mill, to a sign on a downtown business that is out of compliance with the Design Standards of Emmett City.

CHAPTER 2. HISTORIC CONTEXT

HISTORY OF PLACE

Named from the “Gem of the Payette,” Gem County is located thirty miles northwest of Boise and encompasses a total area of 566 square miles. The Payette River and its tributaries provide the foundation for original settlements in Gem County. The river continues to provide water for irrigation to support agriculture and recreation and is home to many kinds of wildlife. Many industries have spurred the County’s economic development, to include lumber, livestock, and agriculture—particularly the fruit industry.

Over time, the area welcomed residents of varying backgrounds: Basque shepherders, Scots/Irish sheep ranchers, Japanese farmers, and Hispanic farm workers, among others. The character of Gem County is defined by the interaction of the many cultures and values introduced and embraced by its residents. Indeed, the diversity of our citizenry gives our community its uniqueness.

The region’s history and its people are what shape present-day life in Gem County.

The Gem County Historical Society and Museum provides information related to the history and culture of the Native Americans who originally inhabited the Payette Valley and chronicles the contributions of the trappers, miners, and settlers who irrigated valley lands and established the local fruit industry. An overview of Gem County’s prehistory and history follows.

Gem County Prehistory

The Payette River, named after the trapper and explorer Francois Payette, supported American Indians who hunted and fished from its shores prior to European settlement. The Nez Perce,

1800
Pre-Contact: Until the 1870s, the Payette was a natural route for Native Americans as they moved seasonally in search of food, attracted by the large number of salmon, big game, edible roots and berries.

1818: The Payette River was named after Francois Payette, who was put in charge of Fort Boise and traveled through the area. The Treaty of 1818 also formalized joint U.S.-British occupation and settlement of what is now Idaho.

1830s: The first European and American men to inhabit the area were fur trappers in the mid-1830s.

1846: The Oregon Treaty settled the joint U.S.-British occupation issue. Idaho and other lands officially became U.S. territory.

1860s: Permanent settlement, called Martinsville, began after gold discoveries in the Boise Basin brought people over the already established stage and pack train routes.

1863: Idaho established as a territory of the US.

1864: The Payette River Valley was a major transportation route to the mining fields.

1883: Emmett was platted.

1900: Emmett was incorporated as a town.

1902: Idaho Northern Railway came to the valley.

1906: Pearl mines closed.

1915: Gem County was established from portions of Canyon County and Boise County.

1924: Black Canyon Dam was constructed.

1939: Gem County Courthouse was built.

1974: A Joint City-County Planning Council was created between Gem County and City of Emmett.

1976: Gem County’s first Comprehensive Plan was adopted.

1996: A Joint City/County Comprehensive Plan was adopted.

2000

Bannock, Kootenai, and Shoshoni peoples gathered along the Payette River to reap the benefits of the plentiful salmon, sage-grouse, geese, and larger mammals. It is estimated that roughly 8,000 American Indians inhabited the region prior to when European explorers ventured into the region. Spanish explorers began moving northward from Mexico in 1592, introducing new crops and animals to the American Indians within the Northwest region of the United States. French-Canadian and American fur trappers arrived in the area. This bountiful river later attracted these trappers who hunted game in large numbers. Their presence is memorialized through names such as Boise, an Anglicization of *bois*, which is French for “the trees.”¹

Settlement History

In 1862, Tim Goodale led a wagon train over a new segment of the Oregon Trail into the Payette Valley through what has since been called “Freezeout Hill.” Freezeout Hill got its infamous name from the travelers having to “freeze,” or lock, their wheels then slide down the hill.² Taking this route required the fording of the Payette River at the approximate location of modern-day Emmett. In 1864, a ferry was built to assist people taking the Freezeout Hill route by Nathaniel Martin and Jonathon Smith.³ The growing settlement adjacent to the crossing, called “Martinsville” in honor of Nathaniel Martin, served as a hub for trade and traffic through the region.⁴ On May 3, 1863, Emmett Lee Cahalan was born in Edina, Missouri. His family emigrated to Martinsville a year later. In 1868, Emmett’s father, Thomas, was appointed postmaster and the post office moved from Martinsville to the Cahalan ranch. Thomas Cahalan then named the new town “Emmettsville,” after his son and the Irish patriot, Robert Emmett.⁵ In 1883, a townsite of 40 acres was platted and in 1885, an independent school district established. By 1885, the community’s name was changed to Emmett in order to differentiate their Idaho community from Emmettsville, Iowa.

Shortly after gold was discovered in the area, Idaho Territory was established in 1863. Although gold was mined at Pearl as early as 1870, and again in 1893, the town did not see substantial growth until after 1894. When interest in silver mining collapsed in 1892, the focus turned to gold and Pearl became a center of activity. It is estimated that Pearl produced 20,000 ounces of gold.⁶

¹ “History of Payette River WMA,” Idaho Fish and Game, <https://idfg.idaho.gov/wma/payette-river/history>

² Amy J. Thompson, “Freezeout Hill,” *Idaho Harvester*, University of Idaho Library Special Collections and Archives Department, June 10, 2019, <https://harvester.lib.uidaho.edu/posts/2019/06/10/freezeout-hill.html#:~:text=Freezeout%20Hill%20was%20so%20named, freight%20wagon%20up%20the%20hill>

³ Arthur Hart, “Idaho History: Emmett is named for the son of an Irish patriot,” *Idaho Statesman*, retrieved from [Microsoft Word - Idaho_History_Emmett.doc \(sbbch.org\)](https://www.idahohistory.org/Idaho_History_Emmett.doc) on June 13, 2022.

⁴ Gem County Historical Preservation Advisory Board, “History,” retrieved from https://www.gemcounty.org/how_do_i/find_learn_about/history.php on June 13, 2022.

⁵ Meg Davis, “What’s in a Name?” Gem County Historical Society and Museum, retrieved from <https://www.gemcountymuseum.org/history-E.Cahalan.html> on June 13, 2022.

⁶ Merle B. Wells, *Gold Camps and Silver Cities: Nineteenth Century Mining in Central and Southern Idaho*, Moscow: Idaho Department of Lands, Bureau of Mines and Geology, 1983, pages 74-76.

Emmett boasted 600 residents at the time of its 1900 incorporation. Construction of the Idaho Northern Railway through the valley brought about a boom in 1902. The 1910 completion of the rail line between Emmett and New Plymouth fueled a second boom. In 1915, Emmett was designated as the County seat of the newly created Gem County. By 1920, Emmett had grown to a size of 6,427 residents, remarkably close to its modern-day population.

RESOURCES

There are archaeological resources and historic properties that have been previously identified in Gem County, as highlighted below. However, without having completed extensive historic surveys or archaeological field studies, there are likely many unidentified archaeological and historic resources in the County.

The Department of Interior changed the official name of "Squaw Butte" to "Sehewoki'i Newennee'an Katete" which is Shoshone language. This was presented at the *Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Cultural Presentation and Dinner* at Fort Hall to the Idaho Heritage Conference attendees on September 19, 2022. It translates to "The Peoples of the Willow standing in a row" according to the Tribes' linguist.

Archaeological Resources

Documented human occupation of southwestern Idaho goes back 12,000 years. According to the Idaho State Historical Society, there are currently 257 archaeological sites recorded in Gem County, the majority of which are on Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, or Forest Service lands. Archaeological site locations are held as confidential information and not released to the general public.

Tribal Governments

Today there are five federally recognized tribes located in the state of Idaho: the Shoshone-Bannock, the Shoshone-Paiute, the Coeur d'Alene, the Kootenai, and the Nez Perce.

Historic Properties

There are 219 Gem County properties listed in the Idaho Historic Sites Inventory, a database of known and documented historic buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts. 168 properties are within the City of Emmett; 51 are located throughout the unincorporated areas of Gem County. Many of these properties are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), although only 10 have been listed in the NRHP.

There are a total of 69 unevaluated properties within Emmett and the surrounding rural areas, in addition to 97 ineligible properties, most of them located within Emmett, but 11 of them are in Sweet.

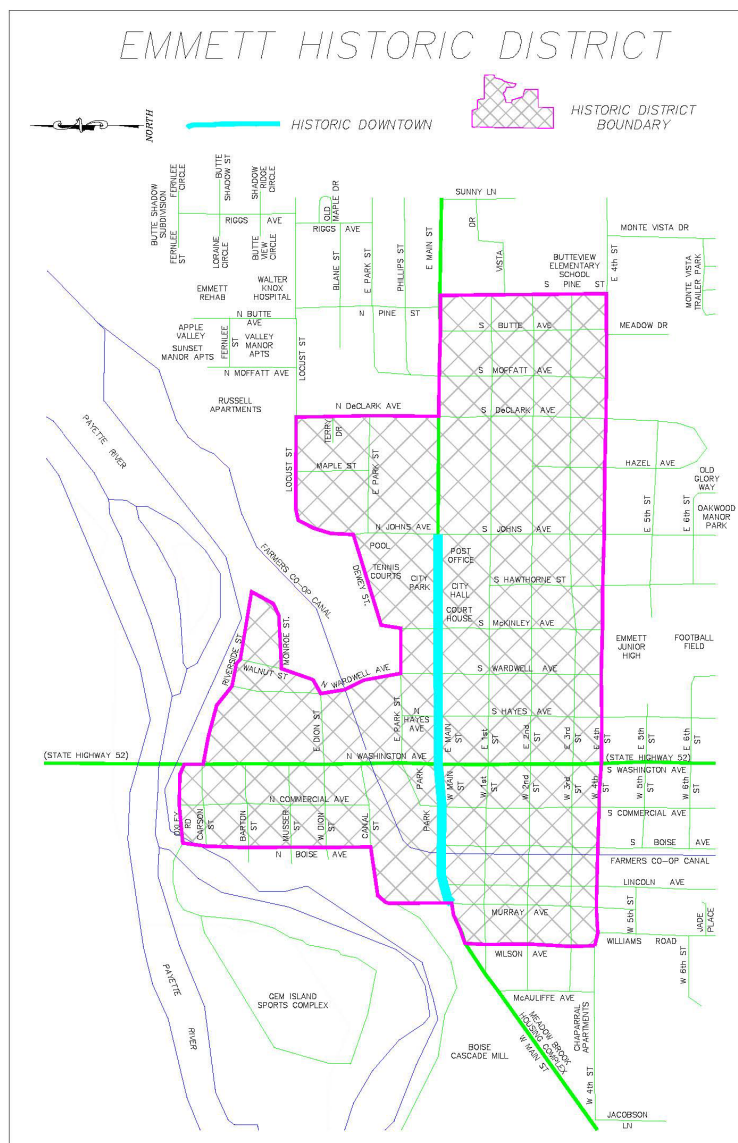
National Register-listed Properties:

- Sweet Methodist Episcopal Church (as of 2019, Sweet Community Church)
- Ola School
- Oregon Short Line Railway Depot (Emmett Depot)

- Gem County Courthouse
- F.T. Bliss House
- First Baptist Church of Emmett
- Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart
- St. Mary's Episcopal Church
- Emmett Presbyterian Church (Emmett First Southern Baptist Church)
- Methodist Episcopal Church (listed in the 1980s; subsequently demolished)

Emmett Historic Central Business District

The City of Emmett designated a Historic Central Business District that encompasses the downtown area between the Payette River to the north and 4th Street to the south, Wilson Street to the west and Pine Street to the east. This Emmett Historic Central Business District is used and referenced in the [City of Emmett Design Manual](#).



GEM COUNTY'S HISTORIC, NATURAL, AND SCENIC RESOURCES

Sehewoki'i Newenee'an Katete:

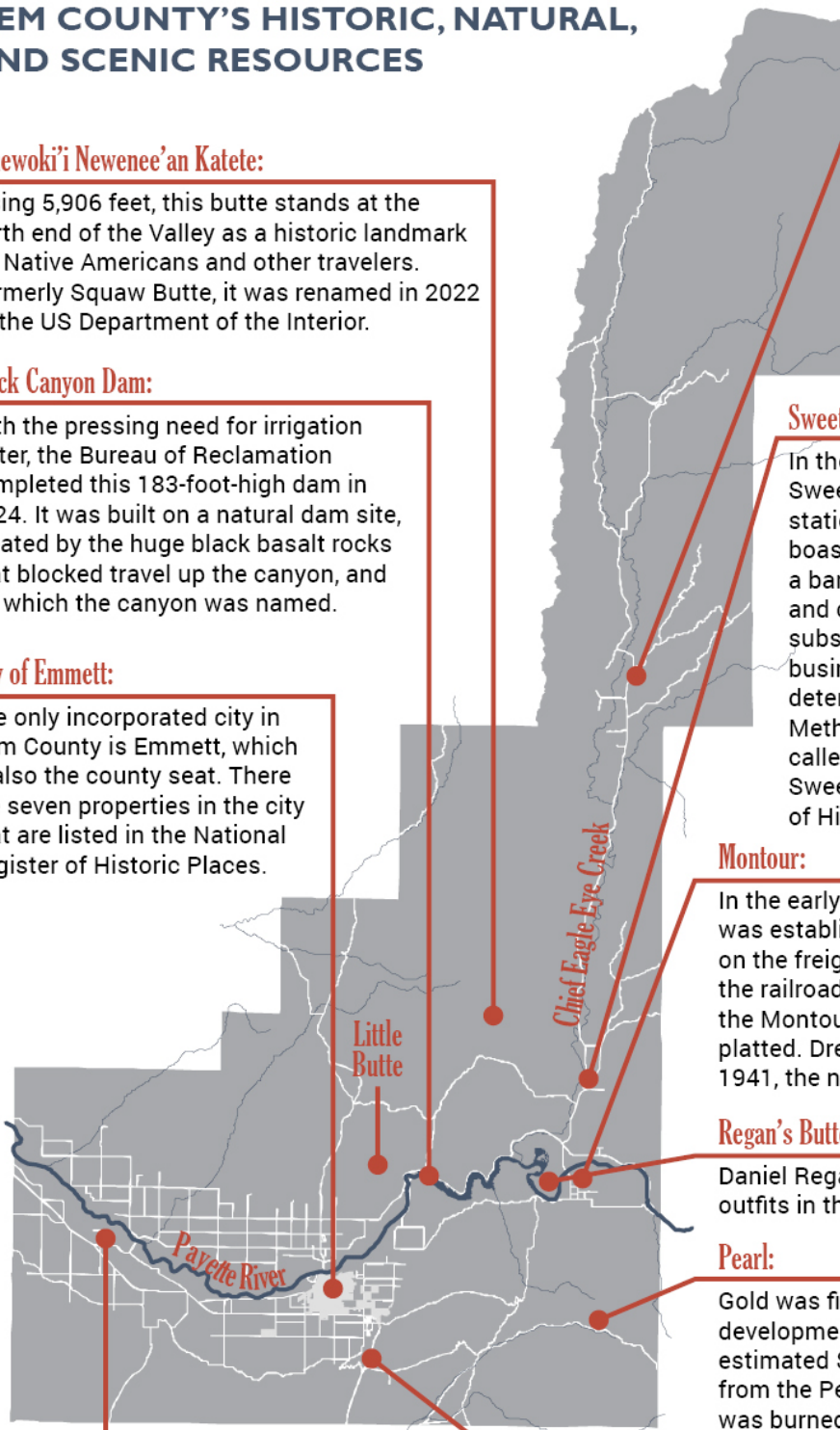
Rising 5,906 feet, this butte stands at the north end of the Valley as a historic landmark for Native Americans and other travelers. Formerly Squaw Butte, it was renamed in 2022 by the US Department of the Interior.

Black Canyon Dam:

With the pressing need for irrigation water, the Bureau of Reclamation completed this 183-foot-high dam in 1924. It was built on a natural dam site, created by the huge black basalt rocks that blocked travel up the canyon, and for which the canyon was named.

City of Emmett:

The only incorporated city in Gem County is Emmett, which is also the county seat. There are seven properties in the city that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



Letha:

In 1910, Colonel Barnard and W.W. Wilton envisioned a town and major rail center to connect New Plymouth to Emmett. That dream was never realized.

Freezeout Hill:

Steep terrain limited access to the Emmett Valley from the southeast. Freezeout Hill was so named because travelers had to lock or "freeze" their wagon wheels and slide down the hill. Views of the Emmett Valley are valued.

Montour:

In the early 1860s, the Marsh-Ireton Ranch was established as a stage and mail stop on the freight road to the Boise Basin. After the railroad came through the Valley in 1911, the Montour business district and town were platted. Dreams of prosperity faded, when in 1941, the new highway bypassed Montour.

Regan's Butte:

Daniel Regan built one of the largest cattle outfits in the area in the late 1800's.

Pearl:

Gold was first discovered here in 1867, but development took off between 1894-1908. An estimated \$12 million worth of ore was taken from the Pearl area. What remained of the town was burned down in 2004.

Ola:

Fifteen miles north of Sweet, Ola was settled in 1864. It remains a farm and ranch community today. Ola's community hall, two-room schoolhouse, and church built around 1910, are still used today. Ola School is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

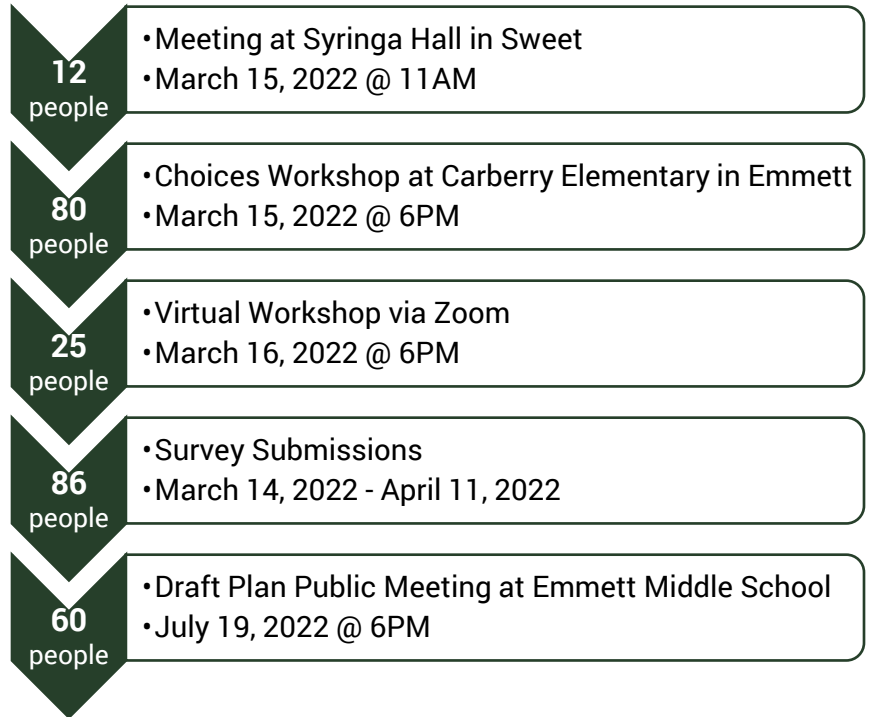
Sweet:

In the early 1880's, during the gold rush, Sweet served as an important freight station. At the turn of the century, Sweet boasted of three hotels, three saloons, a bank, a newspaper, two lodge halls, and other business. After the gold rush subsided and a series of fires in the business district, the town began to deteriorate, and was not rebuilt. The Methodist Episcopal Church (currently called Sweet Community Church) in Sweet is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

CHAPTER 3. COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

PRESERVATION GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OUTREACH

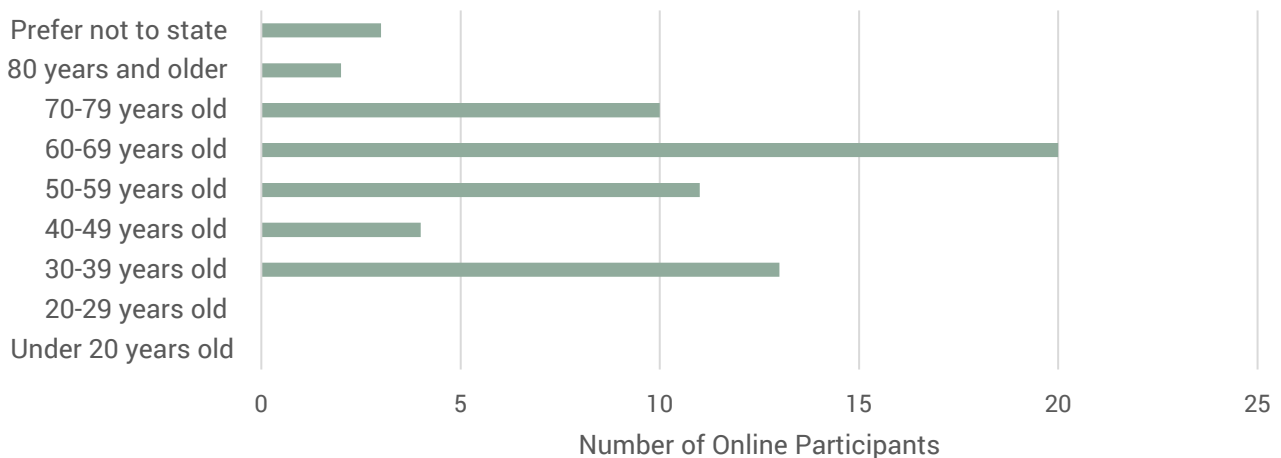
Community feedback on preservation priorities was collected from the Gem County residents at two in-person events, a live online event, and through an online survey for approximately four weeks in March and April. Several of these outreach meetings were done in tandem with the Comprehensive Plan public process. The nine-question survey asked about historic and cultural resources preservation priorities and values. A full report of the survey results (including both online and hard-copy submissions) is in Appendix A.



Participation

Age demographics were tracked for online survey participants. In-person participants were not asked to provide demographic information. Most of the online participants for this plan were between 30-39 years old (~21%) and 60-69 years old (~32%).

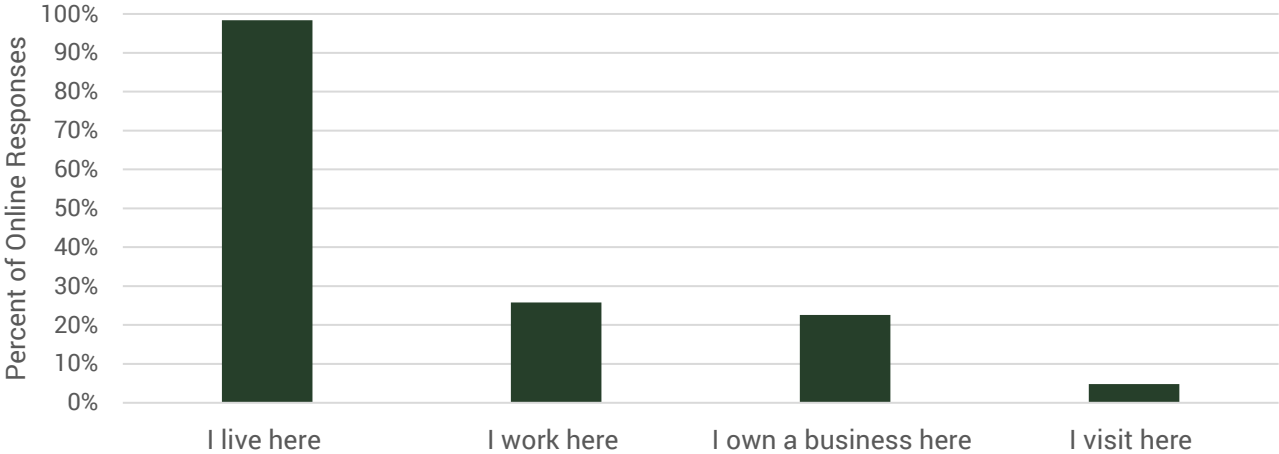
What is your age?



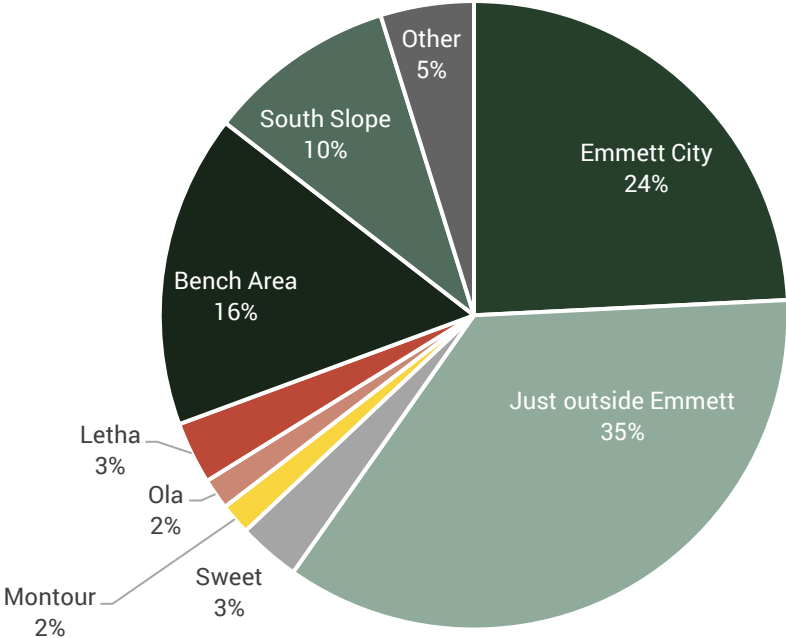
Participants who live just outside of Emmett’s city limits made up the largest group at 35% of online participants, while the second largest area of residence for participants was within Emmett itself (24%). The other areas of Gem County were also represented, from the Bench area to the South Slope and smaller communities like Letha and Ola, however these locations did not have as significant of a response rate.

It is important for this plan to represent the local Gem County community, so the online survey asked about the participants’ relationship to Gem County. Almost all participants indicated that they were local residents (98% of respondents). The survey also captured feedback from business owners and local workers with a small percentage of visitors.

What is your relationship to Gem County?



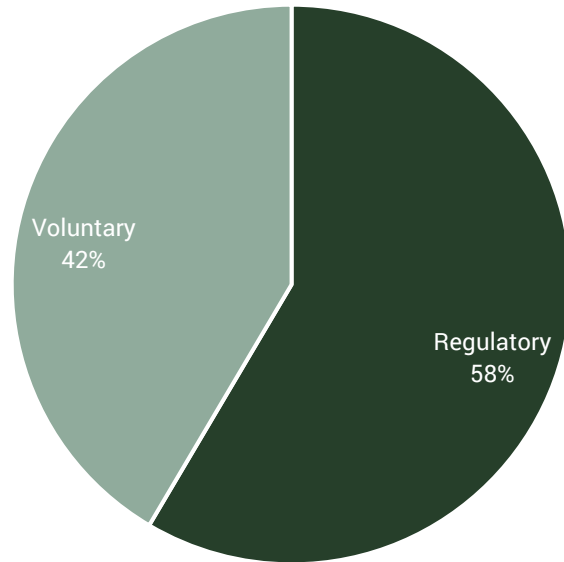
Where is your primary residence?



Tools for Preservation

When asked how historic resources should be preserved, participants were split between voluntary and regulatory measures. Several participants said that they would like a balance of both approaches, while others firmly thought that a voluntary approach is preferred, and that the role of the County shouldn't be to impose more restrictions on land uses and building design.

When considering county regulatory measures for historic preservation such as ordinances and zoning, the majority of respondents showed support. While respondents were split on how many historic places in Gem County are eligible for federal nominations like the NRHP, there was significant support shown for local identification and recognition of more historic buildings. The community saw some concern over the impacts of preservation on private property rights, however most feedback reflected a neutral or unconcerned response.



Priorities

Responses showed that the top three priorities for preservation in Gem should be to adaptively reuse historic buildings rather than demolish them, increase the number of historic buildings on the county's radar and provide financial support for those who are actively preserving historic places. Formal nominations to programs like the NRHP and educational programs for schools were lower priorities for the community moving forward.

Participants displayed their care and consideration for preservation through their desire to discourage demolition when possible and encourage preservation as a top priority. Gem County's unique history is cherished throughout the community, with the preservation of historic buildings being a key component of celebrating that past. The community would like to also see new construction preserve the history celebrated by existing buildings while encouraging environmental stewardship within the built environment.

Implementation

Making sure that the previously mentioned preservation priorities could be effectively implemented required a deeper look at ways of encouraging preservation in Gem County specifically. Knowing their specific community and how it functions, respondents identified preservation grants, historic markers and information, and tax benefits as the top ways that preservation could be successful in the County. Less supported measures included low-interest loans, walking tours, or conditional uses for a landmark site.

Satisfaction with Current Preservation Efforts

Although there was uncertainty amongst respondents about how Gem County is currently working toward historic preservation, dissatisfaction with most current initiatives was a dominant theme. The areas in which there is room for improvement have been made clear through the results of this plan and identify ways in which preservation can continue to serve the community better. The areas of highest satisfaction regarding preservation efforts, however, were public involvement and surveying of historic properties.

Information and Education

In order to spread the news about preservation throughout Gem County, the survey participants identified that the most effective methods would be through historic markers and plaques, web-based information, and various exhibits. A mixture of online and in person methods would allow the County to reach residents and visitors in a holistic way. Awards were expressed as the least effective form of educating and informing the public about local historic preservation.

CHAPTER 4. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Gem County has an opportunity to celebrate its diverse historic and cultural resources through strengthened preservation efforts that will enable residents and visitors to enjoy these resources for years to come. This chapter features a mission statement, vision statement, and four goals to guide ongoing work by the Gem County Historic Preservation Commission.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Gem County Historic Preservation Commission is to honor our past, educate for today, and preserve for tomorrow.

VISION STATEMENT

We envision Gem County as a beautiful community where our history is honored, protected, and preserved; a community that celebrates, respects, and promotes the diversity and culture of its people and natural resources, and creates an environment where culture, arts, and heritage flourish.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCES AND PRESERVATION OPPORTUNITIES.

Objective 1.1: Provide public programs to increase community awareness of the economic and aesthetic value of Gem County’s historically significant places.

Action: Offer historic tours or educational programs for families and small groups such as service clubs, community groups, Senior Centers, home schoolers, and assisted living facilities.

Action: Partner with the Gem County Chamber of Commerce to develop and promote a self-guided walking tour of historic resources.

Action: Propose declaring May as “Historic Preservation Month” to match the national designation and use a May event to promote HPC efforts.

Objective 1.2: Establish a community-wide network to promote preservation.

Action: Partner with the Idaho State Historical Society, Preservation Idaho, and the Idaho Heritage Trust to develop community workshops and education sessions on how to preserve, rehabilitate, restore, and reconstruct historic properties.

Action: Inform local business owners of the benefits of historic designation and involve them in the process of creating tour maps as a way of promoting their businesses.

Action: Partner with local artists to create promotional materials (stickers, fliers, information cards, posters, etc.) to display at events and historic properties.

Action: Gain demographically diverse feedback regarding future preservation efforts by using a variety of outreach methods.

Objective 1.3: Make resources for historic preservation available to the public by integrating them into established community gathering places.

Action: Catalogue history and preservation-related resources available to public, such as the Museum library, public library, online resources such as the GCHM online website, Emmett design standards documents, and the Historic Preservation Commission. Consolidate all relevant resources online and link them.

Action: Inform people about the preservation opportunities available to them through fliers in water bills, power bills, Assessor's tax notices, and other public mailings.

Action: Use publicly accessible and visible QR codes, and other similar identification systems, to promote historic tours and resources. An example could include a link to educational resources on historic landmark signage and plaques which might outline the tools used to preserve the structure and additional historic resources located nearby.

Action: Use and promote technological innovations for preservation efforts as they come along.

Action: Provide resources and educational materials (handouts, information cards, QR codes) to historic property owners to give out to visitors.

Action: Create user-friendly handbook for the community to understand the options available for their property as well as potential funding sources to support preservation efforts.

GOAL 2: CELEBRATE GEM COUNTY'S HISTORIC RESOURCES.

Objective 2.1: Identify Emmett's Historic Central Business District with plaques, street light banners, or monuments at the boundary.

Action: Match elements of plaques, banners, sign toppers, or monuments to tour maps and online resources where possible to ease wayfinding; consider additional wayfinding materials when appropriate.

Objective 2.2: Create walking, driving, or virtual tours and other special events within Emmett's Historic Central Business District and to other historic areas in the County.

Action: Consolidate information about historic properties online in an easy-to-follow format.

Action: Coordinate with the Museum and Chamber of Commerce to promote historic resources during community wide events such as the Cherry Festival, River Through Time, Harvest Festival, and the Gem/Boise County Fair.

Action: Gain community-wide support for tours by establishing relationships with property owners and informing them of times when numbers of visitors may be heightened.

Objective 2.3 Promote thematic branding of preservation based off Gem County's unique history.

Action: Create themed events, tours, or programs that follow or educate about specific historical events. Examples could include prehistoric cultural sites, old sheep trails, or a 4-wheeler, horseback, or hiking tour of Johnson Creek.

Action: Denote historic places with specifically branded, uniform, plaques building off the County's standard logo or work with local artists to come up with a specific HPC logo.

Action: Continue the Historic Bridge Signage Project to include an informational narrative for each bridge for the website, develop a map brochure as a guide to each bridge, and seek grant funding for interpretive signs.

GOAL 3: PRIORITIZE PRESERVATION EFFORTS.

Objective 3.1: Coordinate preservation efforts between Gem County, City of Emmett, local organizations, and private residents.

Action: Identify a City staff person to oversee city historic preservation efforts and coordinate with the HPC, as a liaison for organizations, local businesses, and stakeholders.

Action: Collect oral and written accounts related to historically significant resources, events, and persons from community members; archive interviews and make them available on the website.

Objective 3.2: Develop a quantifiable system by which decision makers can assess historic preservation and rehabilitation efforts.

Action: Review development applications through a lens of criteria that promote best historic preservation practices.

Action: Develop criteria for what makes a Gem County property eligible for local listing and recognition.

Action: Develop a packet for HPC members outlining the basics of historic preservation, their role in the process, their standards for decision making, and how best to collaborate and conduct meetings.

Action: Consolidate all documents related to historic preservation, including applications, process charts, maps, tour resources, and legislation, in one centralized location on the website.

Action: Educate the community about the advantages of preservation over demolition.

Objective 3.3: Consider revising the County's Zoning Code to incentivize redevelopment of historic properties while maintaining their historic character.

Action: Consider waivers or reductions for required on-site parking to preserve the landscape of historic properties within the zoning code.

Action: Consider relief from nonconformity requirements such as setbacks and building heights in exchange for maintaining and/or restoring a historic structure.

Action: Implement language that encourages the retention of original materials wherever possible in the alteration of historic properties.

Objective 3.4: Consider County, state, federal, and non-profit funding incentives.

Action: Create a County tax incentive program for properties that preserve historic facades, buildings, or sites.

Action: Inform property owners of the 20% federal rehabilitation tax incentive program as an avenue for historic property owners to reduce the cost of qualified rehabilitation work.

Action: Utilize the IRS charitable deduction provision through the donation of a façade easement on a historic property.

Action: Apply for Idaho Heritage Trust grants by September 30th (annual deadline) for technical assistance and financial assistance for preservation work on publicly owned buildings.

Action: Consider reducing fees for improvements on historic properties.

Action: Seek FEMA grants for upgrades to properties at risk due to seismic activity, flooding, or other natural disasters.

Objective 3.5: Consider expanding historic preservation to include unique geographies and aspects of the landscape which have been altered by human activity.

Action: Implement a landmark tree program that is integrated into historic preservation efforts, to define what constitutes a landmark tree and provides standards to preserve and maintain said trees throughout the County. This could apply to historic orchards in addition to individual trees that meet the criteria.

Action: Create educational programs about the history and impact of the irrigation system in the valley.

Action: Prioritize the preservation of farm and ranch land by recognizing Century Farms.

Action: Work with local tribes in consultation with Idaho SHPO and the Archaeological Survey of Idaho to determine areas of high likelihood for archaeological and cultural resources to protect them.

Objective 3.6: Consider expanding the roles and responsibilities of the HPC.

Action: Elevate the authority of the HPC to be the primary recommending body for all demolition and alteration applications.

Action: Incorporate specific evaluation criteria into the County's Zoning Code for alternations and demolitions.

GOAL 4: IDENTIFY AND EVALUATE HISTORIC PROPERTIES.

Objective 4.1: Identify data gaps within the inventory of historic properties.

Action: Establish a process for the public to submit properties they think may be eligible for listing, based on a set of standard criteria.

Action: Map existing historic properties to show clusters and identify if there are additional properties around those areas that could potentially form a district.

Action: Prioritize future survey efforts to fill data gaps.

Action: Continue inventory and mapping project of Sweet Cemetery.

Objective 4.2: Work with the Idaho SHPO to identify and evaluate resources for National Register eligibility.

Action: Apply for a grant to outsource survey work to identify eligible historic properties.

Action: Pursue grant funding and outside expertise to build a data site to be used by real estate agents and government entities.

PLAN MANAGEMENT

It is expected that that this document will be updated every 5 years by Gem County in partnership with the Gem County HPC. The action items listed above should be considered annually by the HPC to establish short-term and mid-term priorities.