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Big Sky upgrading chairlift as plush One&Only resort development is built

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In the 2018-2019 season, Big Sky Resort installed its first eight-passenger lift, Ramcharger 8. (BYLINE TK)

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Billings Gazette

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Only weeks after opening its new Lone Peak Tram, Big Sky Resort recently announced it will upgrade its ski lift on the Moonlight Basin side this summer to an eight passenger lift featuring heated seats and a wind-shielding bubble.

“This lift replacement, our seventh in as many years, supports our long-standing reputation for having some of the shortest lift lines in the Rockies,” said Troy Nedved, Big Sky Resort’s general manager, in a press release.

The improvement is the latest in a long list of upgrades and changes at the resort and in the mountain community south of Bozeman that continues to attract wealthy visitors, investors and buyers.

“This new lift also connects our Moonlight Basin community and guests of One&Only Moonlight Basin, scheduled to open in winter 2025, with a greatly elevated lift experience, on par with the rest of Big Sky Resort’s modern lift system and expansive terrain,” said Matt Kidd, president of Lone Mountain Land Co.

One&Only

Advertised as a “glamorous return to simplicity,” the new One&Only Moonlight Basin resort is already advertising homes and condos for sale. A three-story, six-bedroom, six-bath home in the development — measuring 5,751 square feet — is listed for \$14.9 million. A smaller five-bed, four-bath, 3,670 square foot condo is marketed at \$8.9 million.

The development will also include a lodge with 81 guest rooms and suites, 13 detached cabins, a ski lodge, restaurant and spa. Working its way through approval is the construction of a whiskey shack that will provide visitors a rustic drinking establishment with a view. A gondola will connect guests to the development to Big Sky Resort.

Two years ago, a similar ultra-luxury lodge was opened to the public on the opposite side of the resort. The Montage rests close to the exclusive Yellowstone Club and Spanish Peaks real-estate developments that include a private ski area.

Montage features 39 residences and 139 rooms, a bowling alley, restaurants, bars,



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As with One&Only, the Lone Mountain Land Co. is a partner in the Montage development. Lone Mountain Land Co. also bought what was previously the Marlboro Ranch at the southern end of the Crazy Mountains.

The 2,635-unit Flatiron development, proposed near the base of the Thunder Wolf chairlift, has run into problems with water and sewer permitting.

Dubai

On the Moonlight Basin side of Lone Mountain, the land company partnered with Kerzner International Holdings Ltd. to build One&Only Moonlight. Kerzner is an “international developer of destination resorts, ultra-luxury hotels and residences and innovative entertainment and gaming experiences,” according to the company’s website. Among its holdings is The Palm, Dubai, a manmade island in the Arabian Sea.

In 2020, Mohammed Al Shaibani, executive director and CEO of Investment Corporation of Dubai, was announced as the chairman of Kerzner. At the time of the announcement, Shaibani said he “looked forward to the continued growth of Kerzner International, further prosperity and an expanded strategic global footprint,” which now includes southwest Montana.

The Investment Corporation of Dubai is the principal investment arm of the country’s government. Dubai is one of the wealthiest of the seven United Arab Emirates. The majority of Dubai’s income is reportedly based on trade, with two of the world’s largest ports and an international air cargo hub, as well as industrial development.

Shaibani’s role at Kerzner may explain chatter on the social media platform X. In September photos of a private Dubai Air Wing Boeing 747-400 resting at the Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport were posted.

“This won’t end well for us commoners,” one derisive post said.

50 years

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seasonal recreation visitors to more than 3,300 permanent residents split between Madison and Gallatin counties.

Like glitzy resorts in Utah and Colorado, Big Sky is located in a remote area. Unlike those states, the community is surrounded by grizzly bear habitat, wilderness and only an hour's drive from Yellowstone National Park.

Such concentrated development in a rural location has come with its share of challenges and problems, including an increasing amount of wastewater. Recently, the Yellowstone Club announced it was utilizing treated wastewater to make snow on its private hill for the first time — a \$12 million investment that took 26 years to wind its way through the study, permitting and construction process.

The club hails the snowmaking as a means to increase snowpack as the climate warms, providing runoff to help downstream fisheries like the Gallatin River that has suffered from algae blooms, partly blamed on nutrient rich wastewater. “Studies on the Yellowstone Club proposal show this method could equate to a 25-million gallon net benefit to the aquifer and watershed,” Yellowstone Club claimed.

“The current dry winter makes this effort especially timely,” said Rich Chandler, the head of the recycled snowmaking program for the Yellowstone Club, in a statement. “I have heard from multiple Montana ski areas seeking more information about the program, and I expect it will be replicated elsewhere.”

Trout Unlimited and the Gallatin River Task Force have praised the recycling effort.

“We’ve been involved for over a decade collecting data and all the data points to this water being very beneficial to the water supply of the Gallatin River and will ensure that our future generations are able to enjoy the river as we do today,” said Kristin Gardner, a hydrologist and CEO of the Task Force, in a statement.

2025 vision

As investment in the surrounding community continues, the Michigan-based Boyne USA

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and the base of the new Lone Peak Tram. A viewing area at the top of the tram will include a see-through floor. The top of the peak is 11,166-feet high.

At buildout the entire vision was previously estimated at a \$150 million investment, but that was before the pandemic boosted construction costs.

The replacement for the Six Shooter lift on the north side of the mountain is expected to travel at 13 mph, 30% faster, and cutting ride time to only 8 minutes. It will be the world's longest eight-passenger chairlift, Big Sky said, capable of hauling 2,745 riders an hour. The loading platform at the base can be raised to help children get on. A safety bar will automatically lower to protect riders.

To increase space at the base of the lift, it will be moved 40 feet from the existing location, yet the chairlift will following a similar alignment as the current Six Shooter lift.

“This new eight-place lift will greatly enhance the ski access to the full north side of the mountain from the Madison Base,” said Kidd, of Lone Mountain Land Co.

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