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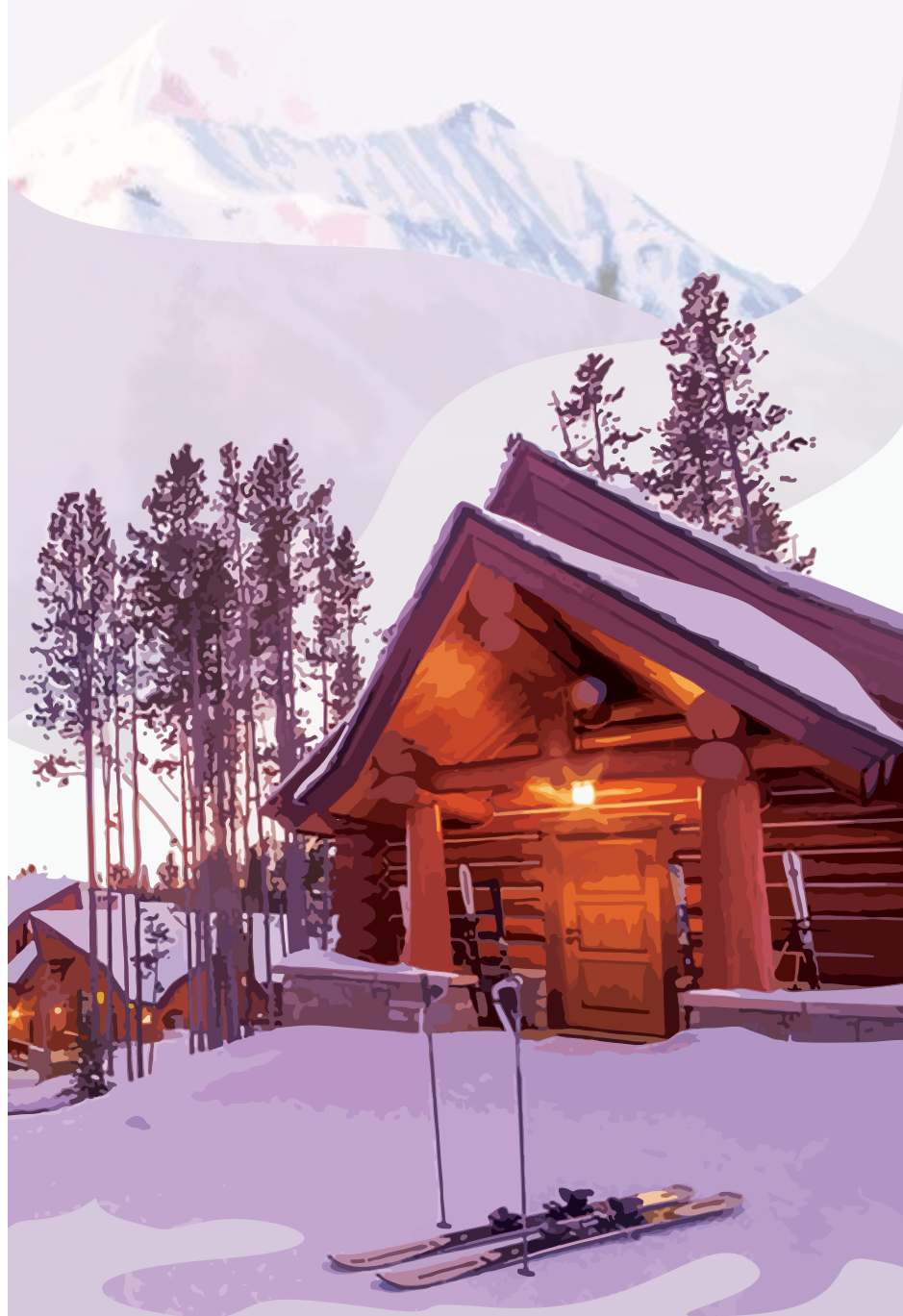
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Southwest Montana real estate market recovering rapidly Big Sky Town Center growing fast

The economy in southwest Montana is booming and Big Sky is at the epicenter. The pickup trucks that pile into the Conoco at the corner of Highway 191 every evening, the cement trucks that rumble daily through Gallatin Canyon, and the large buildings popping up in Big Sky Town Center are all indicators of a brisk economic recovery.

Rotherham Construction is also feeling the regional recovery and has worked on a number of projects in Big Sky's Town Center

such, prices are continuing to rise. We're seeing more and more people looking to purchase second homes and investment type properties."

Brett Tudsbury, associate broker at Coldwell Banker RCI Realty has been in the Bozeman real estate market for 10 years and echoed those sentiments. He noted that the market is reminiscent of the early part of the last decade before the world financial crisis of 2007-2008, but there's more caution on the part of buyers.



The Big Sky Medical Center, currently under construction in Town Center, is scheduled to open in fall 2015. PHOTO BY BRIAN NILES

during the last five years. Among other projects, the Bozeman-based company has built Lone Peak Cinema, the East Slope Outdoors building, Roxy's Market, the RJS Building (home of the EBS office), and is soon to complete the TNG tower across the street from Fire Pit Park.

The 17,000-square-foot Roxy's Market opened Nov. 6 and the 43,000-square-foot Big Sky Medical Center in Town Center is slated to open its doors in late fall 2015.

"The real estate market in Big Sky continues to trend upward," said Ania Bulis, broker at Christie's International Real Estate - Pure West. "Sales are steady, inventory levels have come down, and as

"Buyers [now] seem to be a little more careful with their decisions than back then," he said. "They're making more informed decisions, and getting professional advice when they're buying and selling."

With 30-year, fixed-mortgage interest rates hovering around 4 percent, according to Bankrate.com, and the global economy slowly recovering, the region should continue to see rapid growth.

"I think we're going to have a big year next year," Tudsbury said. "Everybody's pretty optimistic the market is going to continue on the path it's going for a while."

Big Sky's housing crisis

Housing is a serious issue throughout the Big Sky community, where both rental and purchase prices are inflated, inventory is limited, and the population is growing.

This is not a new problem, but that doesn't take away the sting many people in the area feel today.

"It was the same in '95," said Ron Edwards, General Manager at the Big Sky Water and Sewer District. "I remember going to a realtor, trying to find somewhere [to live] back then. Same deal."

So Edwards, 55, moved to Four Corners and has lived there ever since, commuting 45 minutes, four days a week, to his office in the Big Sky Meadow Village.

Both the well water and sewer treatment systems in Big Sky are able to accommodate growth for the next 15-20 years, according to Edwards; but the residential and affordable housing coin is still being flipped, and it's landing on the same side it has for decades: face down.

"Housekeepers, [servers], bartenders... These employees are on the frontline," said Sheila Chapman, Big Sky Resort's Public Relations Manager. "We all know they're not making \$60,000 a year. From [Horse of a Different Color] to the Hungry Moose to Big Sky Resort's management team, we have to bring affordable housing to the people who are going to live, work and raise their families here."

In February, Economics and Planning Systems, a Colorado-based consulting firm, released preliminary findings for a Big Sky housing study it's been working on since November 2013. The project was paid for with local resort tax dollars and conducted to answer questions about why there is a shortage of reasonably priced housing in the area.

\$150 Igloo Community (Pets welcome) (Big Sky)



Big Sky Resort employee Tim Dietz posted this Craigslist ad after weeks of searching for housing in Big Sky, to no avail.

"We are way behind the 8-ball," said Big Sky Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kitty Clemens, who has led meetings to discuss the area's housing issues since February 2013. "Aspen does the best job, and they've been doing this since the '70s. Vail has been doing this for [more than] 20 years."

Greater Big Sky's area median income is \$58,369, according to EPS's report; by earning this salary, area households can afford to purchase a home valued at \$181,000, the report said.

As of Dec. 21, the cheapest single-family home in Big Sky was listed at \$439,000.



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WHERE BIG SKY COMES TOGETHER

The Big Sky Town Center is the natural gathering place in Big Sky, Montana – with restaurants, galleries, grocery stores, a movie theater and shopping, this is where Big Sky comes together.

Second annual Rut, new events leave marks on Lone Mountain

On the morning of Sept. 13, nearly 400 headlamps flickered in the 33-degree darkness at the base of Big Sky Resort. At 6 a.m. sharp, The Rut 50K/12K co-race director Mike Wolfe sounded a plaintive elk bugle that resonated through the crisp fall air, sending the first of three waves of runners on a circuitous, 50-kilometer race to the summit of Lone Mountain and back.

In just over five hours, Spain's Kilian Jornet came galloping back to the start line, throwing out high fives to the cheering crowd as he locked up his first Rut 50K win and the 2014 Skyrunner Ultra World Series title.

Emelie Forsberg won the women's race by just over five minutes. The top three for both the men's and women's fields finished the 2014 Skyrunner Ultra World Series in the same order, which was not a surprise, according to race co-director Mike Foote.

As the Skyrunner World Series Final, the International Skyrunning Federation as well as title sponsor Salomon brought a lot of attention to Big Sky, according to Lyndsey Owens, the resort's director of marketing.

"They really promoted the race through their channels and put Big Sky Resort in front of their audiences," Owens said, noting that the two videos Salomon released before The Rut experienced more than 90,000 views, and she is sure the rest of Big Sky felt the economic impact.

"The vibe at the start and finish - and everyone that came out to spectate and cheer - was incredible," she said. "We're really looking forward to doing it again next year." Next year's event is scheduled for Sept. 4-6 and registration opens Jan. 5 at 8 a.m.

Big Sky Resort also experienced huge crowds for their inaugural Vine and Dine Festival Aug. 14-17 and the Kid's Adventure Games Aug. 22-23, hosted at the resort for the first time.



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Paul Hamilton descending from the summit of Lone Mountain with Cedar Mountain in the distance, during the Rut 50K on Sept. 13. PHOTO BY TYLER ALLEN



Terraflow Trail Systems owner Pete Costain rips down the Otter Slide Trail at Big Sky Resort on July 28. Costain designed and helped build the new downhill directional flow trail this summer. PHOTO BY TYLER ALLEN

BSCC and Big Sky Resort install new trails

The Big Sky Community Corp. in summer 2014 received a \$35,000 Recreational Trails Program grant for new area trails from Big Sky Area Resort Tax and the Smith Family Foundation

The new trails – called Hummocks and Uplands – comprise five miles of varying terrain for biking and hiking, and will eventually connect to the Ousel Falls Trail. The nonprofit has installed 13 signs on the trails, of the 64 total parks and trails signs that comprise the project. The remaining signs are being fabricated and will be installed in spring 2015.

Big Sky Resort has hopped on the trail train as well. It's known as an experts-only downhill biking destination, but with the newly constructed Otter Way and Otter Slide flow trails, that reputation is beginning to change.

The 2.15-mile Otter Way Trail was completed the first week of July, giving riders a multi-directional "flow" experience with berms and intermediate switchbacks.

The 1.25-mile Otter Slide was finished the first week of August

and offers a "downhill directional flow," experience, according to trail designer Pete Costain, owner of Whitefish-based Terraflow Trail Systems. Both trails link the resort's Moonlight Basin terrain and Mountain Mall base area, offering riders of all abilities an alternative to the steep and rocky downhill trails serviced by the Swift Current chairlift.

"What sells lift tickets is flow trails," Costain said after a late-July ride. Otter Slide was still a couple days from completion, but had already seen a number of local users. "It's really satisfying as a trail builder making a lot of people happy," he said. "I've gotten emails and texts saying, 'This is the best flow trail Big Sky's ever seen.'"

While all the rock on Lone Mountain and the silt-type soils presented some challenges during the 2014 trail building season, Costain says he's mitigated many of those issues using careful route finding. He's also optimistic about the resort's possibilities in coming years, especially on Andesite Mountain.

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With historic GOP win, Daines seeks to moderate his positions

First-term congressman Steve Daines ended a century-long Democratic lock on one of Montana's U.S. Senate seats. The landslide victory over Democratic opponent Amanda Curtis was served on a veritable platter after the former math teacher from Butte threw together her bid following the implosion of Sen. John Walsh's campaign amid plagiarism allegations.

Throughout his campaign, Daines stressed his roots in the private sector. He left Proctor & Gamble to return to Montana in 1997 and invest in a cloud-computing startup called RightNow Technologies. The company's sale to tech giant Oracle made Daines a wealthy man. Today, his assets are reported to range between \$8.9 million to \$32.7 million.

Curtis, a one-term state legislator, said Daines' wealth has made him an ineffective representative in Congress and that his politics put him out of touch with most Montanans.

"It's not how conservative I feel that he is," she said. "It's based on his record."

During his time in Congress, Daines co-sponsored the No Taxpayer Funding For Abortion Act and voted to extend deadlines for employer provisions under the Affordable Care Act. An analysis of his voting record by Montana State University political scientist David Parker found Daines is the state's most conservative representative since World War II.



U.S. Rep. Steve Daines defeated opponent Amanda Curtis in the November midterm elects, capturing approximately 58 percent of the vote. PHOTO BY WINSLOW STUDIO

Parker said Daines' record may put him at odds with a state that's not as politically red - or conservative - as it might appear.

"My impression is that it's a far more purple state," he said. "I think people are comfortable voting person rather than party."

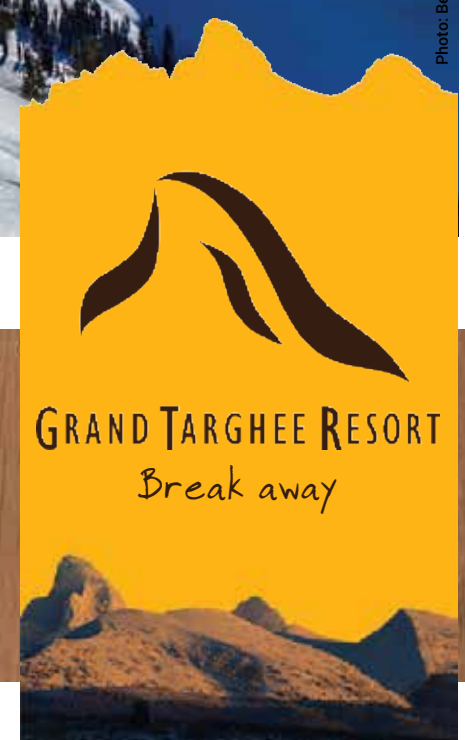
While not specifically refuting the conservative claim, Daines countered that he is not afraid to cross party lines on critical issues that cannot be reduced to "labels."

"Sometimes I'll cast a vote and the folks on the left will be upset," he said. "Sometimes I cast a vote and the folks on the right will be upset."



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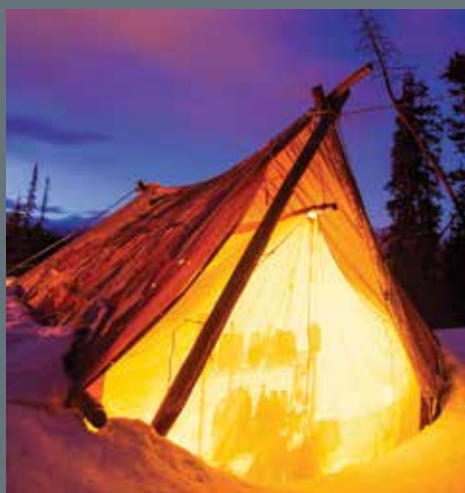
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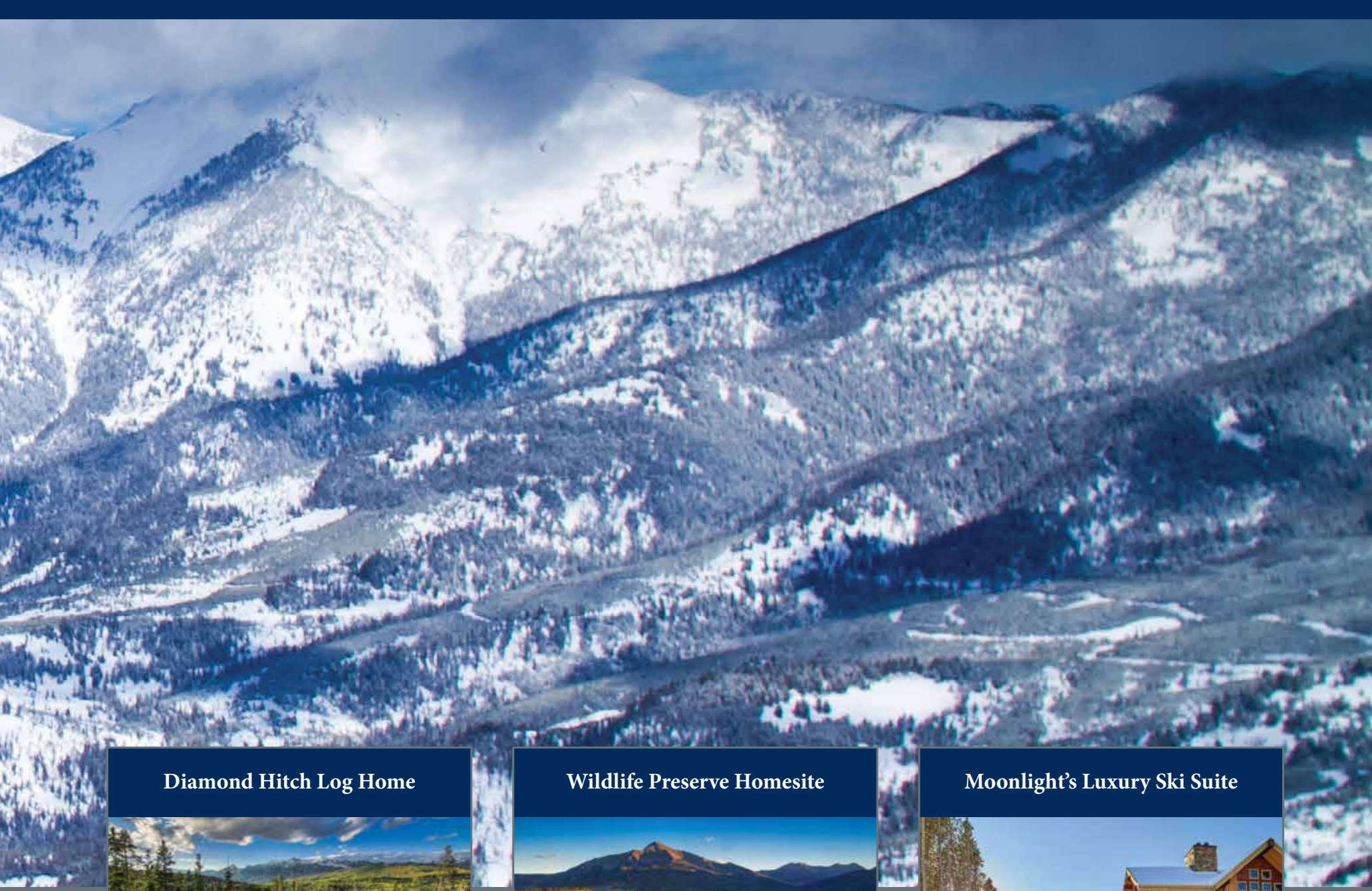
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New Year's Day Onion Basin avalanche fatality

At approximately 6 p.m. on New Year's Day, 2014, the Gallatin County Sheriff's office was advised of an avalanche south and east of Big Sky in Onion Basin.

Three snowmobilers from Bozeman, Ken and Kenneth Gibson – father and son ages 46 and 19, respectively – and Kenneth's friend Zachary Walker, also 19, were in the area when Ken and Walker were caught in a large avalanche between 2:30 and 3 p.m. All three had avalanche beacons, probes and shovels, and were familiar with their use, and both Gibsons wore airbag backpacks.

Walker was able to dig himself out, and he and Ken located Gibson using avalanche transceivers, uncovered him and attempted CPR for 40 minutes but were unable to revive him. The teenagers made their way out to the Portal Creek trailhead north of Big Sky and notified authorities. Because of darkness and severe avalanche conditions, Big Sky Search and Rescue did not attempt to access the area that night.

On the morning of Jan. 2, 18 rescuers from Gallatin County Search and

Rescue and two forecasters from the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center located the body and conducted an investigation.

Breaking 1-3 feet deep and 400 feet wide, the avalanche started at 9,200 feet, just below the ridgeline, said GNFAAC forecaster Eric Knoff, who skinned to the crown to investigate. From crown to toe, it ran 1,100 feet slope-distance and 500 vertical feet, with debris ranging from 5-8 feet deep.

A New Year's Eve storm had deposited a heavy load of snow, and Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center forecaster Mark Staples issued an Avalanche Warning on Jan. 1 for the northern Gallatin Range. This was the second such warning for that region in 10 days.

Gibson's was the first avalanche fatality of the 2013-2014 winter in Gallatin County, and one of six fatalities in Montana over the season. A weak layer that formed at the ground during cold weather in December created unstable conditions that persisted for much of the season.



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Lone Peak High School golfers, football team excel

The Lone Peak High School golf team on May 21 and 22 made a statement at Double Arrow Golf Course in Seeley Lake. The boys defended their Class C state championship and the girls took home the second place trophy.

Junior Tehya Braun paced the Lady Big Horns finishing second individually – one shot out of first place – with the best performance of her golfing career. Junior Tate Tatom won the boys' individual title for the third consecutive year,



The Lone Peak High School golf teams take a victory lap in Big Sky Fire's ladder truck on May 23 to celebrate their state tourney success at Seeley Lake. PHOTO BY JOSEPH T. O'CONNOR

anchoring the defending champs as they cruised to a 16-shot win over second-place Chinook.

The girls' team finished eight strokes ahead of third-place Sunburst – only to be outdone by the low-scoring girls from Belt – securing the first state trophy for a girls' squad in LPHS athletics history. The LPHS football team made its own history in the fall.

The Big Horn six-man football team notched the program's first ever playoff win on Nov. 1 in Big Sky. LPHS outplayed the North Star Knights on the way to a 50-33 victory, weathering a 30-minute lightning delay to set up a second-round game in Savage the following weekend.

The Big Horns weren't able to muster the same resolve on Nov. 8 when they traveled to No. 1-ranked Savage and lost, 77-14.

Although LPHS was unable to advance against the Warriors, winning its first playoff game versus North Star was a big step for the program. The team received accolades for its strong season with three players earning All-State honors and four receiving All-Conference nods.

Justin Mayse, Justin McKillop and Cooper Shea took home both All-State and All-Conference awards, and Tanner Burton was selected as an All-Conference player.

Next up for Big Sky football is the state all-star game in Custer held in June. Head Coach



Eddie Starz evades a tackle during Lone Peak High School's 50-33 historic playoff victory over North Star on Nov. 1. PHOTO BY THERESA DA SILVA

Matt Bakken said selections from the Big Horn team depend on how many seniors from other conferences are selected, but he expects up to four LPHS players could be chosen for the game.

"These seniors we have are a real special group," Bakken said. "Those six kids were here when the program first started, and many of them had never played football before. It's quite an accomplishment."

Montana tourism on the rise

Montana had a successful 2014 summer travel season with tourism numbers up significantly over previous years. The influx of visitors to the region's national parks was especially notable.

Glacier National Park had nearly 700,000 recreational visitors in July, up 8.4 percent from July 2013 and the highest on record. August was another record month for Glacier, according to the National Park Service, with 675,000 guests – a 7.8 percent increase over 2013.

Yellowstone National Park saw more than 850,000 visitors in July, an increase of 5.7 percent from last July's total. August visitation was up 6.7 percent, to nearly 775,000 visitors in 2014. The National Park Service tracks visitation numbers in the parks.

"We have consistently experienced 3 million or more recreation visits a year for several years and we are certainly on track to see another 3 million-plus year," said Al Nash, spokesman for Yellowstone National Park, in September.

Barbara Shesky, executive director of the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce, said the numbers for Yellowstone's north entrance are also up.

The town is about to experience some changes as the Gardiner Gateway project moves out of the design phase and into the construction phase, in preparation for the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, in 2016.

"Our hope is to have the signature event here on Aug. 25, 2016, so I would suspect that tourism would continue to increase," Shesky said.

West Yellowstone also saw an increase in tourism this summer with the busiest months being June through August.



Tourists wait in anticipation of Old Faithful's calculated eruption at Yellowstone National Park this summer. PHOTO COURTESY OF NPS

"The West gate has recorded increased traffic over previous years, with the biggest jump being in busses," said Wendy Swenson, marketing director for the West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce.

Daniel Iverson, Public Information Officer for the Montana Department of Tourism, likened Montana's success to that of its parks: "Usually if national parks are doing well, the whole state is doing well."

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Southwest Montana elk just shy of state record

Thirteen minutes remained in the 2014 hunting season on Nov. 30, just enough time for Big Sky local Jim Schwalbe to tag the biggest bull elk of his life in southwestern Montana.

It took him the entire season to find the bull he was waiting for – one bigger than the six-by-seven-point he has hanging in Choppers Grub and Pub in Big Sky. Through binoculars and a spotting scope, Schwalbe, 61, had glassed elk for 10 days before going out on the hunt.

At 5 p.m., Schwalbe spotted a six-point bull elk near him, but it took off when it caught wind of him. He ran after the bull and came across it again when it joined a group of three others. And then he got it – the one he'd been waiting for, an eight-by-eight behemoth.

"I picked up his head and said, 'Woah. This is a nice bull,'" said Schwalbe, a 41-year Big Sky resident originally from Pewaukee, Wis.

Bull elk antlers are classified as typical – essentially symmetrical – and non-typical, meaning they have tines or points growing in different places

causing the antlers to look different from each other.

The unofficial score put Schwalbe's elk's antlers at 444 points, which would have surpassed the Montana state record for American non-typical elk of 429 1/8, according to the Boone and Crockett Club scoring system that equates points with inches. But the official scorer, Fred King of Gallatin Gateway, took it down a few inches because of tine imperfections.

"When it comes down to the official measurement, things change," said King, who's been an official scorer for the Boone and Crockett as well as Pope and Young clubs since 1984.

The gross "green" score – which is the official score until the antlers have dried for 60 days after the kill – put Schwalbe's elk at 423 7/8, but after differences in symmetry were subtracted from the main frame, and when 14 4/8 inches for non-typical points were added back into the total, King scored it at 396 6/8.

"The thing I've learned over [the] years is any time you get a trophy ... that's an outstanding animal."



Big Sky local Jim Schwalbe stands with the massive elk he tagged 13 minutes before the 2014 hunting season expired. PHOTO BY SCOTT HAMMOND



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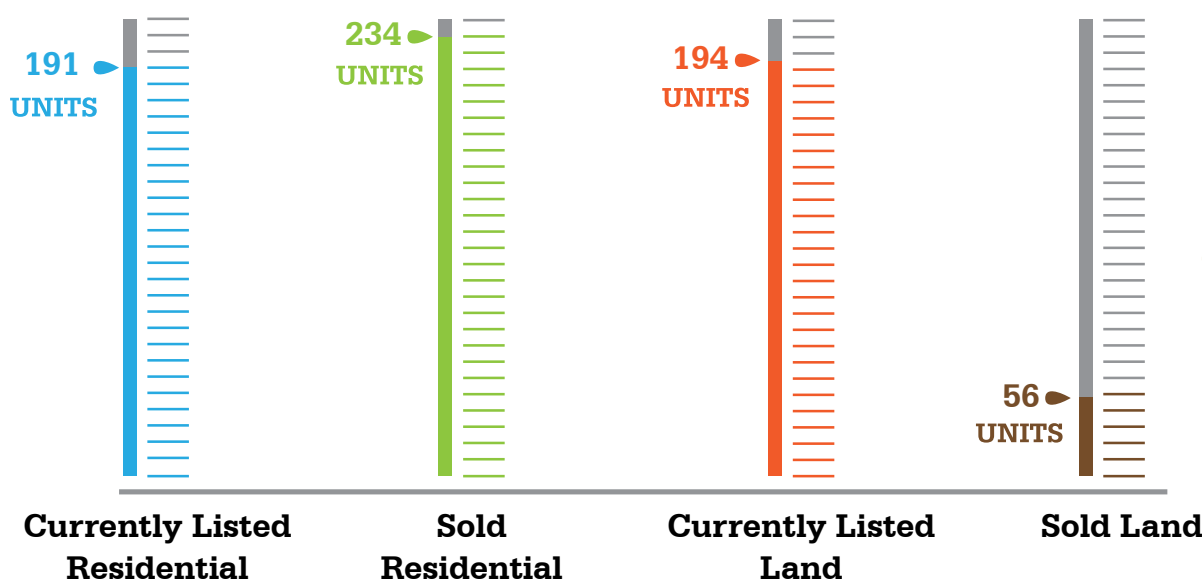
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