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## New slopes to conquer in Idaho, Montana

**By Christopher Solomon**  
*Special to The Seattle Times*

The wheels of development grind slowly for new and expanding ski areas, but they do move: The American West has been given not one but two new ski areas in the last two winters.

Last winter, Moonlight Basin opened south of Bozeman, Mont. — the first full-service, destination ski resort in the United States in more than two decades. This winter, it's joined by Tamarack Resort in western Idaho, near McCall.

Here's the early line on each of them:

### Tamarack

The views recall Tahoe. And the terrain? Call it Steamboat West. That's the word on Tamarack Resort from those who have skied this area 90 miles north of Boise. Tamarack opens in December after two decades in gestation and years of controversy.

The Tahoe analogy is plain from atop 7,700-foot West Mountain. Far below, the peak dips its feet into 22-mile-long Lake Cascade, which almost fills Long Valley. Tamarack's locale isn't just aesthetic, however. The resort lies just west enough to rack up one-third more snowflakes than Sun Valley annually. Yet it also lies just east of Oregon's high desert, which ensures that the bounty arrives talcum-dry.

Don't expect these slopes to push your skis to their limits. The top third of the mountain alternates between open bowls and natural glades of aspen and western larch. The tree skiing, and the languorous blue runs with names like Serenity that unspool down the mountain's 2,800 vertical feet,



[enlarge](#) SHERRI HARKIN / TAMARACK RESORT

Tamarack, in Western Idaho near McCall, will open in December.

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harken to Colorado's Steamboat — diverting, if not exactly heart-stopping. Snowcat-skiing again will be offered this winter at additional cost, to show off 500 acres that the owners expect to make lift-accessible next winter.

It's all part of a \$1.5 billion master plan to make Tamarack a year-round resort with some 2,000 chalets, condos and hotel rooms. This winter, just 40 cabins and cottages are available for rent at the base; for the best après-ski, head to the cool little resort town of McCall, 15 miles north.



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Tamarack's scenery has been likened to spectacular views at Tahoe.

Info: 208-325-1000,  
[www.tamarackidaho.com](http://www.tamarackidaho.com).

### Moonlight Basin

Every good ski hill has a multiple-personality disorder. No ski area, however, is more starkly Jekyll-and-Hyde than Moonlight Basin, the 1-year-old Montana resort that shares a boundary with nearby Big Sky. I skied Moonlight last March and found this out firsthand: First, Moonlight lulls you, with the nurturing side of its personality. Then it tries to kill you.

But first, the lull part: Moonlight was initially conceived as a real-estate venture, and the ho-hum blue and black runs that meander down the north face of 11,166-foot Lone Mountain seem tailored to middle-age buyers of vacation homes. Adding the new Lone Tree lift this winter should help fill out those offerings, by adding 1,000 acres of low-level expert runs and open glades.

### The West's new ski areas



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Moonlight's sadistic side, however, is what will soon have hard-bitten skiers abuzz. To find it, just look up: The Headwaters is a crashing fist of a mountain that rises 1,000 feet from the apron of greens and blues. It's knuckled with sharp rock bands and striped with the kind of worry-your-mother chutes in which tomorrow's ski stars might cut their teeth — and occasionally, their scalps and elbows and knees. Three Forks — perhaps the steepest in-bounds run I've skied in the U.S. — is the Headwaters' boast-in-the-bar run, a 1,500-foot plummet into Stillwater Bowl that nudges 50 degrees in spots. Unfortunately, until a surface lift is built, reaching such lines requires a hike of 20- to 45- minutes.

Moonlight's managers envision building up to 12 lifts across 3,500 acres of skiing in the next 15 years, which would make the place one of the larger resorts in the U.S. For now, legal tussles with neighboring Big Sky limit the services offered.

Info: 406-993-6000 or [www.moonlightbasin.com](http://www.moonlightbasin.com).

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