

The Belleayre Resort at Catskill Park

A project history, 1947 to 2026

Prepared September 13, 2026 from the project record: the 2007 Agreement in Principle, the SEQRA history and permit status memoranda, the Ulster and Delaware County deed indexes, the 2015 Findings Statement and the town approval resolutions.

Summary

Dean Gitter assembled roughly 1,960 acres on both sides of the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center between 1999 and 2001, buying parcel by parcel from more than thirty separate owners. He proposed a resort. What followed was seventeen years of environmental review, negotiation and litigation, ending in approvals that were upheld on appeal and re-affirmed by both towns in 2019. Gitter died in 2018, before any of it was built.

Along the way the project was cut roughly in half by agreement, more than 1,200 acres went to the State as Forest Preserve, and 203 acres went under a New York City watershed easement. What remains in private hands is about 670 acres.

1. The mountain, before the project

The Highmount Ski Center operated from 1947 to 1993 on the western shoulder of the same ridge that carries Belleayre. Two T-bars, a Poma lift, a novice area and a dozen named trails. It closed in 1993 and has been dormant since, which is why the land next to a State ski mountain was available to assemble at all.

Belleayre itself is the anomaly that makes the corridor work. Article XIV of the New York Constitution requires Forest Preserve land to be kept forever wild, and Belleayre exists under a specific constitutional exception that permits the State to operate a ski center there, capped at 25 miles of trails. It is run today by the Olympic Regional Development Authority.

2. The assemblage, 1999 to 2001

Crossroads Ventures LLC was formed in 1999. The operating agreement in the project file is dated June 30, 1999. The first deed into Crossroads was recorded on May 3, 1999, from John H. Mann. Thirty-three acquisition deeds follow in the Ulster County index alone, concentrated in an eighteen-month run.

The sellers were a cross section of who had owned the Catskills for the previous half century: private families, a fish and game association, two sportsmen's clubs, a spring water company, a realty partnership, the County of Ulster, and the operators of the closed ski hill.

Acquisitions that matter to the current offering

Recorded	Seller	What it became
May 3, 1999	John H. Mann	The first parcel into Crossroads Ventures
Oct 28, 1999	Van Loan Road Associates Inc.	Dry Brook Road land, parcel 4.-2-2.200
Dec 30, 1999	Ridge Sportsmen's Inc. (four deeds)	Including the Galli Curci Road commercial parcel 4.5-1-5, bought by Ridge from Highmount, Inc. six months earlier for \$250,000
Dec 30, 1999	Worldbridge Associates LLC (two deeds)	Corridor land
Jan 10, 2000	Ski Highmount Inc.	The former Highmount Ski Center
Mar 17, 2000	Silk Road Organization Inc.	A Gitter-affiliated entity

Recorded	Seller	What it became
Apr 3, 2000	Pine Hill Crystal Spring Water Co.	Water rights and wellhead land
Aug 3, 2000	County of Ulster	Tax title land
Apr 19, 2001	Southern New York Fish & Game Assn.	Interior acreage

The result was 1,960 acres in two non-contiguous groups on either side of the State ski center: the Big Indian Plateau, roughly 1,242 acres east of Belleayre in the Ashokan Reservoir watershed, and Wildacres, roughly 718 acres to the west. Both sit inside the Catskill Park and inside the New York City water supply watershed, which is the fact that shaped everything that followed.

3. The first project and the review that stalled it, 1999 to 2006

Date	Event
December 1999	Initial project concept submitted to the Town of Shandaken Planning Board
March 2000	NYSDEC declares itself lead agency for the SEQRA review
December 2003	The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is declared complete and enters public review
2004 to 2006	Issues conference and adjudicatory hearings
December 2006	The DEC Commissioner's Interim Decision identifies the substantive and significant issues to be adjudicated

The original program was one economically integrated resort across both assemblages. The opposition was organized and well funded, the watershed exposure was real, and by the end of 2006 the project was in front of an administrative law process with no clear end. Seven years in, nothing was built.

4. The Agreement in Principle, September 5, 2007

Rather than litigate the adjudication to a conclusion, the parties settled. The Agreement in Principle was executed by the State of New York, the City of New York, Crossroads Ventures, and the environmental organizations that had opposed the project: the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the New York Public Interest Research Group, Riverkeeper, Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, Trout Unlimited, and the Zen Environmental Studies Institute.

It is a detailed document, not a statement of intent. What it did:

- Abandoned the eastern half of the project. Crossroads ended its development effort on the Big Indian Plateau.
- Sold 1,216.5 acres of the Big Indian Plateau to the Trust for Public Land for conveyance to New York State, to be held as public open space.
- Required a watershed conservation easement over the 203 acre Adelstein parcel in the Town of Middletown in favor of the City of New York, with a building envelope of no more than 10 acres and impervious surface capped at 43,560 square feet. Section 26 of the Agreement said the easement would provide for no residential, overnight lodging or industrial uses.
- Re-scoped the western project into the Wildacres Resort and the Highmount Spa, with a hard cap on unit counts.
- Required Crossroads to record covenants in favor of the easement holder limiting lodging and residential density to the modified project, and barring Class III gaming.
- Committed DEC to trail and lift improvements at Belleayre, expanding from roughly 14.5 miles of trails toward the constitutional limit of 25.
- Bound the parties and their successors and assigns.

The easement itself was executed three years later, by Crossroads on November 17, 2010 and by the City on October 14, 2010. Its operative restriction, section 4.9, reads in full: “Residential dwellings, and improvements related to industrial use, are prohibited on the Easement Property.” It does not carry forward the overnight lodging prohibition described in the Agreement in Principle. Inside the building envelope the easement restricts total impervious surface to one acre or 30 percent of the envelope, whichever is smaller, and contemplates utilities, a water supply and a subsurface sewage treatment system serving a use allowed under the easement. The examples it gives of permitted improvements include an amphitheater and tennis courts. A buyer should confirm the instrument as recorded at the Delaware County Clerk and obtain the Department of Environmental Protection’s position before relying on the difference.

The Agreement also contemplated conveying part of the former Highmount Ski Center to the State for incorporation into Belleayre. That never happened. The ski center parcel remains in private ownership and no State acquisition is pending.

The trade was straightforward. The developer gave up the more sensitive half of the holding and accepted permanent limits on the rest. The opposition stopped opposing. That is why this project got through a review that kills most Catskills development, and it is the single most valuable thing in the file.

5. Rebuilding the application, 2007 to 2013

Date	Event
November 2007	Final scoping document issued, splitting the review into three parts: Part A, the Belleayre UMP and DEIS prepared by DEC; Part B, the Supplemental DEIS for the modified resort prepared by Crossroads; Part C, a cumulative impact analysis prepared by DEC
April 2011	The Supplemental DEIS is submitted, running past 7,400 pages with more than 100 full size construction sheets
November 2011	The State completes its acquisition of the Big Indian Plateau. The deed to the People of the State of New York is recorded December 6, 2011
April 2012	A revised SDEIS is submitted, repositioning one of the alternatives as the preferred plan

Date	Event
April 2013	The SDEIS is declared complete. Public comment closes July 25, 2013

6. Approvals, 2015 and 2016

Date	Event
September 2015	NYSDEC issues the Final Environmental Impact Statement
December 2, 2015	NYSDEC issues the SEQRA Findings Statement, the individual SPDES stormwater permit, and the Protection of Waters stream disturbance permit
January 13, 2016	Town of Shandaken Planning Board issues its findings statement, special use permit and site plan approval
January 14, 2016	Town of Middletown Planning Board issues its findings statement, special use permit and site plan approval
December 14, 2016	The Delaware River Basin Commission issues the groundwater withdrawal and water exportation permit, with a twenty year term

Measured against what was originally proposed, the approved project was a different animal. The site went from 1,960 acres to 739. Developed acreage went from 573 to 218. More than 1,200 acres went to the Forest Preserve and 203 acres went under conservation easement.

7. The litigation, 2016 to 2019

Approval did not end it. The Catskill Heritage Alliance filed Article 78 proceedings in February 2016, in Albany County against DEC and in Ulster County against the Shandaken Planning Board.

Date	Event
October 2016	Ulster County Supreme Court remits the matter to the Planning Board, requiring a Zoning Board of Appeals interpretation before the special use permit can stand
December 2016	Albany County Supreme Court dismisses all claims against DEC
February 15, 2017	The Shandaken ZBA issues the required interpretation
March 2017	Shandaken re-issues the special use permit and site plan approval. Middletown re-affirms its own
March 2017	A further Article 78 is filed against the ZBA, the Planning Board and Crossroads
June 2017	Ulster County Supreme Court dismisses all claims against the ZBA and the Planning Board
April 2018	The Appellate Division dismisses the appeal from the Albany County decision
May 2018	The Appellate Division dismisses the appeal from the Ulster County decision
March 2019	Both town planning boards re-affirm the special use permits and site plan approvals

Every challenge was resolved in the project's favor, at every level. For a buyer, that record is worth more than the permits themselves. The opposition that mattered has been to court twice and lost.

8. What changed after 2019

Dean Gitter died in 2018, the same year the Appellate Division cleared the last of the appeals. He had carried the project for nineteen years, from the first deed in 1999 through the settlement, the review and the litigation. The approvals survived him. The program did not advance without him.

Nothing was built, and time did the rest.

- The DEC permits lapsed. The SPDES renewal is incomplete and the stream disturbance permit is being treated as a new application. The blocker is a 2013 stormwater pollution prevention plan that needs updating to current standards.
- The approvals were program specific. The 2015 findings and the 2016 resolutions approved a particular set of buildings in particular places. A buyer who changes the program restarts SEQRA and the special permits regardless of their status.
- Construction costs roughly doubled, which retired the original resort economics.
- The Catskills market itself changed. Ulster County visitor spending has grown 81 percent since 2019 and is now the fastest growing county visitor economy in New York.
- Opportunity Zone 2.0 arrived in 2025, and both Shandaken census tracts are confirmed eligible and rural.

So the asset stopped being a resort under development and became something else: an assembled, studied, litigated and surveyed piece of Catskills land next to a State ski mountain, in a market that had moved underneath it.

Chronology

Date	Event
1947 to 1993	The Highmount Ski Center operates, then closes
June 30, 1999	Crossroads Ventures LLC operating agreement
May 3, 1999	First acquisition deed recorded
Dec 30, 1999	Ridge Sportsmen's conveys four parcels including the Galli Curci Road commercial building
Jan 10, 2000	Ski Highmount Inc. conveys the former ski center
Dec 1999	Project concept submitted to the Town of Shandaken
Mar 2000	NYSDEC declared SEQRA lead agency
Dec 2003	DEIS declared complete
Dec 2006	DEC Commissioner's Interim Decision
Sept 5, 2007	Agreement in Principle executed
Nov 2007	Final scoping document, review split into Parts A, B and C
Apr 2011	Supplemental DEIS submitted
Dec 6, 2011	Big Indian Plateau deed to the People of the State of New York recorded
Apr 2013	SDEIS declared complete
Sept 2015	Final Environmental Impact Statement issued
Dec 2, 2015	SEQRA Findings Statement, SPDES permit and stream disturbance permit issued
Jan 13 and 14, 2016	Shandaken and Middletown findings, special use permits and site plan approvals
Feb 2016	Article 78 proceedings filed
Dec 14, 2016	DRBC water permit issued, twenty year term
Feb 15, 2017	Shandaken ZBA interpretation
Mar 2017	Both towns re-issue or re-affirm approvals
2018	Dean Gitter dies
Apr and May 2018	Appellate Division dismisses both appeals
Mar 2019	Both towns re-affirm the special use permits
2025	Opportunity Zone 2.0 enacted under federal law
2026	Opportunity Zone eligibility confirmed for both Shandaken tracts; parcel closings in February and August

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 Compiled from the project record. Dates and document references are taken from the Agreement in Principle, the SEQRA history and permit status memoranda in the project archive, the Ulster and Delaware County deed indexes, and the 2015 and 2016 findings and resolutions. Acreage is from the current Crossroads Ventures land schedule.