

Company
Saunders
Firm size
500-1000
Firm type
General contractor
Revenue
\$719 million
Focus areas
Commercial, institutional
HQ
Englewood, Co
Phase
DESIGN PLAN BUILD OPERATE
Capabilities
Project management Quality management Document management
Outcome
Cost Schedule Quality

How Saunders Construction completed a complex ski resort project at 10,000 feet



Image courtesy of Saunders.

Since 1972, Saunders Construction, a Colorado-based construction manager and general contractor, has focused on building what matters. And for many Coloradans, winter sports matter—a lot.

In 2021, Saunders was awarded the Steamboat Springs Ski Area project to revitalize and expand the mountain village, a project worth over \$200 million all in. Once complete, Steamboat Springs will be the second-largest ski area in the state, with 650 acres of new ski terrain, the largest and fastest gondola in North America, and LEED-certified retail establishments.

Working on a multi-year project at altitude is a tall order—but having the right tools helped Saunders reach new heights. By deploying Autodesk Build, part of Autodesk Construction Cloud, Saunders could keep teams connected throughout the project lifecycle.

80%
time-savings in resolving RFIs

800%
increase in design team usage with Autodesk BIM Collaborate

95%
client involvement on Autodesk Build

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The Steamboat Springs Ski Area project

Because the mountain receives heavy ski use in the winter months, the project needed to be completed over the summer in phases while still working around summertime visitors in the village. “This is a unique project that’s going to have a big impact on the community of Steamboat Springs,” says Clayton Neiman, Continuous Improvement Manager at Saunders. “But what made it challenging was the remote location and the large scope of work we had to complete in a short amount of time.”

With these constraints in mind, Saunders saw the opportunity to upgrade its BIM 360 instance to Autodesk Construction Cloud to take advantage of the added capabilities within the platform. With Autodesk Construction Cloud, Saunders can connect design to construction, mitigating potential issues before they become real problems.

“When we go out to the field, we’re not experiencing big ‘gotchas’ where we’re forced to make last-minute decisions,” shares Matt Hamann, Design Phase Manager at Saunders. “With Autodesk Construction Cloud, we can maintain design integrity across the project lifecycle and ensure our clients get the building they’re expecting.”

Getting teams on the same page

With significant complexity and 200+ workers on the project, the Steamboat Springs renovation proved high stakes. Saunders implemented Build on the project’s second phase, including construction on the lower level of a new gondola, an ice rink, a food hall, and more. With Build, Saunders could move forward with better documentation in the field even with users working on the remote mountain terrain.

“We chose Steamboat Springs as the pilot for Build because our testing showed the stability of pulling up drawings in the field, the ease of uploading drawings, and several other items that increased our productivity, which was necessary to meet site conditions,” says Matt. “We were laser-focused on ensuring our team had what they needed to implement Build, so we didn’t have to move platforms in the middle of the project.”

To ensure the successful deployment and adoption of the technology, Saunders relied heavily on the Autodesk Construction Cloud Learning Center, using videos to learn about best practices. They also met weekly with the Autodesk team to implement new modules into their workflow.

The result was minimal resistance. The ease of uploading drawings and managing changes spoke for itself. Plus, the lack of calls about issues showed Saunders’ leadership that Build was working well.

“Getting a large project like Steamboat Springs running on a new technology platform in just days, with teams working remotely on a mountain with little infrastructure, is a testament to how intuitive and reliable Build is,” says Matt.

Connecting design to construction

On a project of this scale, Saunders realized how much they were at risk of having to redo work—which is both costly and often dangerous—if they didn’t have updated, real-time models and information.

“Bringing everything together within Autodesk Construction Cloud has made our processes a lot easier because we can connect things in a way we weren’t able to before,” says Clayton.

This has also led to more interactions with design team partners using Design Collaboration in Autodesk BIM Collaborate. Five years ago, Matt estimated that 10% of design teams participated in design collaboration with contractors, and now with a seamless desktop to cloud experience, it’s closer to 90%.

Saunders is also happy with how Build is helping its project engineers save time.

“It would generally take our project engineers a week to update the drawings,” says Matt. “With Design Collaboration, that work is being done within a matter of minutes, and it’s live, so it’s freeing up a massive amount of time for our project teams to focus on what they need to.”



Image courtesy of Saunders.

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—Matt Hamann
Design Phase Manager, Saunders



Image courtesy of Saunders.

Maintaining schedule and resource planning

With the variability in weather conditions on the mountain, Build helped optimize Saunders' schedule, increasing collaboration among all team members.

This was especially beneficial for procurement; the team ran all submittals through Build. By creating custom submittal workflows across multiple reviewers, Saunders minimized the time spent waiting on sign offs, speeding up the procurement process.

"Everybody saw what was happening in real time," says Matt. "With such a short timeline, it was critical for us to get feedback from the design team or answers on issues to the field quickly so we could act on it and minimize rework down the line. Build helped us expedite those functions."

Saunders was also able to resolve RFIs and issues quickly because they were tagged on drawings or models precisely where the problem was, eliminating the need to search for it in documents.

"Having all of the drawings at our team's fingertips saved hours a day going back to the trailer, which, of course, would be a trip down the mountain," says Clayton. "Our teams saved about 80% on time because of this."

The continued path to innovation and broader rollout

Matt is quick to point to Build as a key component of the success of the Steamboat Springs project, freeing teams from time-consuming tasks like loading new drawings or dealing with submittals and allowing them to focus on the critical tasks needed to keep the project on schedule.

Saunders is using Build on over 100 projects, with plans for company-wide adoption. They've realized benefits across the board—not only in the project itself but also in strengthening client relationships.

"Build fosters trust between the design team and the client, so they have more visibility and can get involved in the review process, ensuring that we meet their expectations," says Clayton. "Before Build, we would see about 5% client involvement in the platform; now we have about 95% involvement."

As Saunders looks ahead, having all data in one platform will be a game-changer for studying and leveraging that data to increase efficiency, enhance safety efforts, and better serve clients.