



South Platte River Denver, Colorado

RESTORING AND REVITALIZING AN URBAN WATERFRONT

CDM



South Platte River Confluence Park serves as a community asset for recreation and community activities.

Denver's South Platte River, with its headwaters in the Rocky Mountain Front Range, flows east from the mountains through the foothills, becoming an urban river as it passes through the city for more than 10 miles. The river has supplied the citizens of Denver with water for drinking, electrical power, landscape irrigation, recreation, and natural respite for more than 100 years. Once known as the ignored, polluted, "sad, bewildered nothing of a river" as James Michener called it, the South Platte River has become a vital, attractive community asset that spurred a redevelopment and revitalization of Denver's downtown area, brought back a sense of community to thousands of urban dwellers, and made Denver a national leader in the restoration and development of urban greenways.

Funding Through Cooperative Stakeholder Involvement

A commitment made in the early 1990s by Denver's Mayor Wellington Webb to create an environmental legacy while preserving the natural resources of

the river corridor led to the creation of the South Platte River Commission in 1995. Empowered by an ordinance, the South Platte River Commission consisted of a coalition of government agencies, non-profit organizations, and diverse community representatives with a common vision of developing a framework for decision-making and management of the South Platte River Corridor into the future.

As program manager for the restoration of the remaining sections of the South Platte River, CDM helped guide the City's vision by balancing project needs with timely communications. For example, CDM initiated and coordinated river tours and facilitated meetings between 30 to 50 stakeholders to help identify common interests, determine project issues, stimulate progress on project activities, and secure funding. Through the development of grass-roots support, CDM assisted the City in completing its vision and was instrumental in developing and facilitating the partnership between the City and County of Denver, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,

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Urban Drainage and Flood Control District, the Greenway Foundation, Xcel Energy, and others. CDM and this coalition of private and public stakeholders developed a Congressional Request that garnered \$20 million in funding for restoration of Colfax Reach and Denver County Reach – the last remaining reaches of the river in the City and County of Denver. These projects will benefit fish and wildlife habitat, provide flood control improvements, and create recreational opportunities in Denver’s Upper Central Platte Valley.

“The South Platte River Corridor will be known and cherished by the citizens of the City and County of Denver. If we care for our River, protect its natural resources and help restore its beauty and quality, the South Platte will provide present and future generations unmatched opportunities for recreation, education, and enjoyment.”

South Platte River Commission

Timely Preservation of Natural Resources

The work of the City and private organizations, with guidance from CDM, has resulted in hundreds of acres of new and improved park lands, major improvements to the greenway trail system, enhanced wildlife habitat along the river, and numerous in-stream improvements designed to make the river healthier and friendlier to boaters and other recreational users. Renewed environmental consciousness also led to increased interest in the river as a resource for wildlife and native plant communities. Over 50% of Colorado’s bird species, as well as many terrestrial and aquatic species, use the river corridor as their primary habitat. Improvements to adjacent parks and trails have also created additional recreational resources for urban residents and has invited private and commercial interest in investing in the river corridor’s overall well-being.

Strengthening the Economy

Restoration and revitalization of the South Platte River increased the recognition that the river’s value equals more than just storm drainage and water delivery for consumption. A clear sign of the rediscovery of the South Platte River as a promoter of economic redevelopment is the new homes and mixed-use development in and near the corridor that have gained in value from their proximity to the river. Today, a host of recreational and educational resources have contributed to the river’s attraction as a destination for residents and tourists alike. Thriving businesses, Colorado’s Ocean Journey, Six Flags Elitch Gardens amusement park, a new REI flagship store complete with kayak runs, and the Children’s Museum are located along the river and have contributed to Denver’s strengthened economy.

Creating a More Livable Community

Nearly 10 years after the City’s vision statement for the river was adopted, the South Platte River is now a focal point for environmental and cultural life-long learning, focused on the relationship between people and their environments. It serves as an anchor for community revitalization and provides the setting for a number of amenities for city dwellers and tourists alike. The demographic shift back to urban living has also eased traffic congestion on the highways and has contributed to improved air quality. The South Platte River now provides opportunities for shelter and relief from urban stresses to both humans and wildlife, and will serve as an environmental, historical, and cultural backbone for the citizens of Denver for generations to come.



The river corridor now provides additional recreational resources for urban residents.

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