



*"By perceiving
ourselves as part
of the river,
we take
responsibility
for the river
as a whole."*

~ Vaclav Havel

Long Range Management Framework

South Platte River Corridor



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Co-chairs	iv
Executive Summary	v
A Vision for the South Platte River Corridor	1
Introduction	3
The Context: History and Accomplishments to Date	4
What are the Purposes of This Plan?	8
Planning Process	10
Guiding Principles	12
Map Inserts	
<i>South Platte River Parks and Parkways</i>	
<i>South Platte River Land Use</i>	
The Long Range Management Framework	15
Overview	16
Strategy I: Create an Effective and Coordinated Management System ..	18
<i>Management Philosophy</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Management Structure</i>	<i>22</i>
Strategy II: Improve the River for People, Recreation and Wildlife	
through Integrated and Balanced Management	26
<i>Case Study: Multi-Objective Management for Recreation</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Overall Goals for Integrated and Balanced Management</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Adaptive Management Strategies</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Public Safety</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Regional Cooperation and Partnership</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Public Involvement</i>	<i>37</i>
Strategy III: Develop the Resources and Capacity	
Necessary to Meet Challenges	40
<i>Develop and Maintain Resources and Capacity to Achieve Vision</i>	<i>42</i>
Conclusion	43
Appendix	47
Greenway and Natural Areas Ordinances	48
Natural Areas Classification Overview	53
GIS Layers List	56
Instream Issues Report	57

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November 2000

Dear Reader:

You hold in your hands a blueprint for the future of the South Platte River Corridor in Denver.

This document represents the convergence of diverse interests who have forged a common vision for our River. The Mayor's South Platte River Commission is a dynamic and active body who have met regularly over the course of five years and worked closely with City staff to develop not only ideas but the means to achieve them. The 10.5 miles of the South Platte River through Denver is rich with history and is Denver's most important natural resource. Denver and all of the communities along the River depend on the South Platte for many uses – including water supply, agriculture and recreation. The River is also critical to the wildlife of the area. There is often competition and sometimes conflict among user groups.

The Commission has served as a diverse forum to consider all of the issues relating to the South Platte, and has charted a course of restoration and stewardship that we hope will be continued. This framework is intended to be used as an active document, a framework for future decisions about the compatibility of corridor projects with our vision and as inspiration for the development of new projects that will continue to help us achieve that vision. With its use, the health of the South Platte River, the natural, cultural and recreational backbone of our community, will be ensured for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Wellington Webb
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Co-Chair, SPRC

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SPRC Long Range Management Framework

The past seven years have witnessed a transformation of Denver's South Platte River Corridor (SPRC). A commitment to the River's future made by Mayor Wellington Webb in the early 90's led to the creation of the Mayor's South Platte River Commission in 1995. The work of the Commission and city staff resulted in hundreds of acres of new and improved park lands, major improvements to the historic greenway trail system, enhanced wildlife habitat along the River and numerous in-stream improvements designed to make the River healthier and more friendly to boaters and other recreational users.

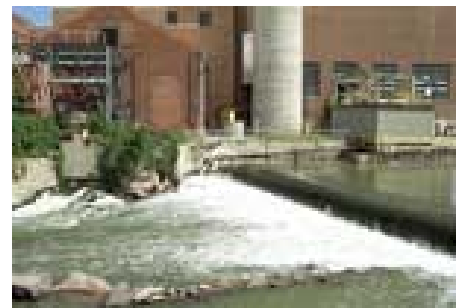
This Long Range Management Framework represents a six-month effort to build on the progress made so far and to ensure that interagency cooperation and shared vision for the Corridor continue to benefit future generations. Toward that end, the Commission has carefully considered various issues and made recommendations to the City in four key issue areas:

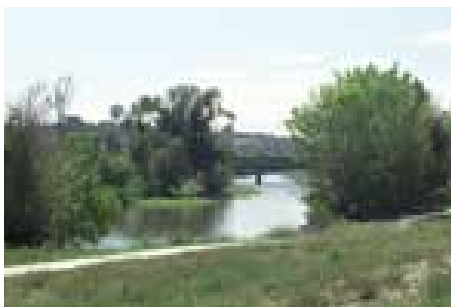
Vision and Management Philosophy ■ What is our vision for the Corridor? How will the River Corridor be managed for multiple objectives (i.e. public recreation and wildlife habitat), while protecting water quality and public safety as the “bottom line”? What vision and values should guide future management decisions?

Recommendation: A revised version of the Commission's 1995 Vision Statement was developed and adopted:

We want the South Platte River Corridor to 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.

The Commission also recommended that the City designate and manage the entire Corridor (as defined in the Greenway Ordinance) as a City “Active Use” Natural Area, with Conservation and Preservation Natural Area designations to be applied to areas needing special protection. It was further recommended that an Adaptive Management approach be applied to overall corridor management, whereby management of land and water resources toward identified goals is continually monitored, evaluated and adapted to integrate best management practices and to respond to changing conditions over time.





Management Structure ■ What type of institutional structure is needed to formalize the cooperative approach that has made the Commission so successful in achieving its goals? What type of institutional alternatives exist and how can Corridor work and funding be protected from the impacts of political change? How can we ensure that management and decision-making in the corridor continues to integrate and balance multiple values and objectives held for the Corridor by its stakeholders?

Recommendation: Create a South Platte River Corridor Council (SPRCC) – an advisory group made up of all major city agencies working on the River, as well as a number of other stakeholder groups. This group should be empowered by ordinance, and initially staffed administratively out of Denver Parks & Recreation. It should be co-chaired and convened by the Manager of Parks and Recreation and a community leader appointed by the Mayor. It will meet quarterly to review and make recommendations on all activities taking place on the River Corridor. It will also engage subcommittees to address a variety of topics needing more detailed attention (e.g. water quality, regional cooperation).

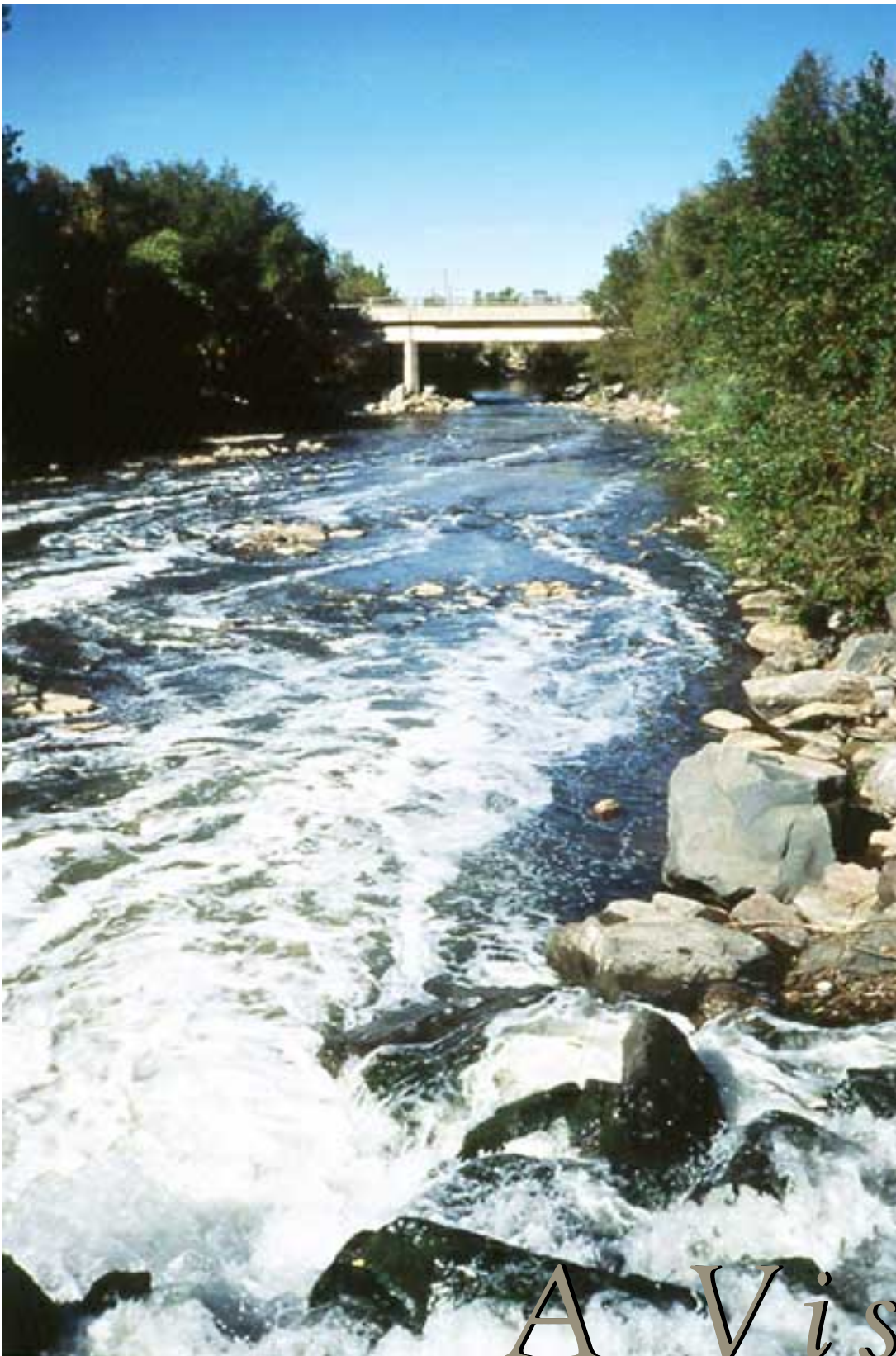


Achieving an Integrated and Balanced Management Approach ■ Can we clearly define a set of goals and objectives to guide corridor management for multiple objectives, including wildlife, recreation, water quality and flood control issues, public safety, regional cooperation and partnership and public involvement?

Recommendation: Use the carefully developed and agreed-upon Guiding Principles and Goals and Objectives laid out in this report as a framework for management decisions.

Developing Resources Necessary to Meet the Challenges ■ What resources are available to achieve the vision, goals and objectives set forth in this document? What type of partnerships can be utilized most effectively toward achieving common goals?

Recommendation: Through the creation of the SPRCC and the initiatives of its members, work collaboratively to identify and attract funding for multi-objective projects. Wherever possible, utilize partnerships with existing non-profits and others to support and build upon programs that meet common goals and objectives.



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River Corridor to be
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A Vision

South Platte River Corridor







"[T]he Oregon Trail followed the Platte and North Platte. It was neither an easy trail nor a trustworthy river, and very early the saying started that the Platte had less water and more mischief than any other western stream."

*~ Louisa Ward Alps,
Denver in Slices: A Historical
Guide to the City*

Introduction



*history
and*

*accomplishments
to date*



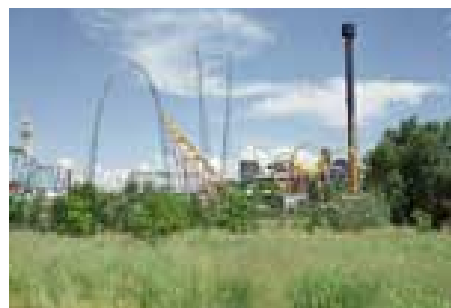
The Context: History, and Accomplishments to Date

Denver's South Platte River has its headwaters in the Rocky Mountain Front Range, south and west of Denver. It flows from the mountains through the foothills, becoming an urban river as it passes through the City for 10.5 miles. To the north and east of Denver the River passes through rural areas where it supports agricultural economies in eastern Colorado and Nebraska, before joining the North Platte. The Platte River continues on through farmland, small towns and broad flood plains that create the famed crane habitat in Nebraska. The Platte finally empties its waters into the Missouri River on the Iowa state border, which flows from there into the Mississippi River and ultimately, the Gulf of Mexico.

The South Platte River, located where the Great Plains meet the Rocky Mountains, figures centrally in the history of the city. The area was home to original Native American settlements, and the city of Denver grew up at the confluence of the South Platte and Cherry Creek. The river valley also served as a railroad corridor and magnet to industrial interests who could use it both as a source of water and a convenient way to dispose of wastes and by-products. In Denver's arid environment, this River once declared by settlers to be "a mile wide and an inch deep, too thin to plow, and too thick to drink," has been and continues to be the lifeblood of the community. We rely upon it for drinking water, electrical power, landscape irrigation, recreation, wildlife, industry and natural respite.

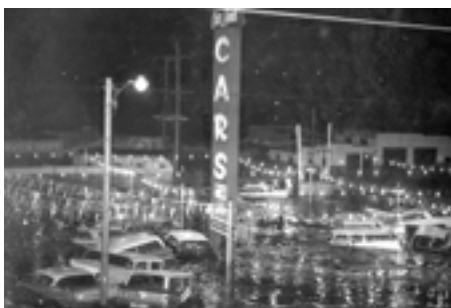
Over time, there has been increasing community recognition that the river's values equal more than storm drainage and water delivery for consumption by the state's residential, agricultural and industrial interests. The river corridor offers opportunities for shelter and relief from urban stresses to people and wildlife alike. It serves as a sort of environmental, historical and cultural backbone for the entire community. Over 50% of the state's bird species as well as many other terrestrial and aquatic species need river corridor habitat, and the South Platte River Basin is among the most significant riparian systems in the state.

At the same time, the River provides the setting for a number of amenities for city dwellers and tourists alike. Historically, the South Platte Corridor in Denver provided a venue for rodeo, pro baseball, showboating, horse racing, circuses, tent revivals and an entry/ exit point for settlers of all kinds. Today, Colorado's Ocean Journey, Six Flags Elitch Gardens amusement park, the new REI flagship store, the Children's Museum, the kayak run at the Confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte, and numerous trails and parks along the Platte have contributed to its attraction as a destination. A clear sign of the rediscovery of the River is the new homes and mixed-use developments in or near the corridor that have gained value from their proximity to the river.



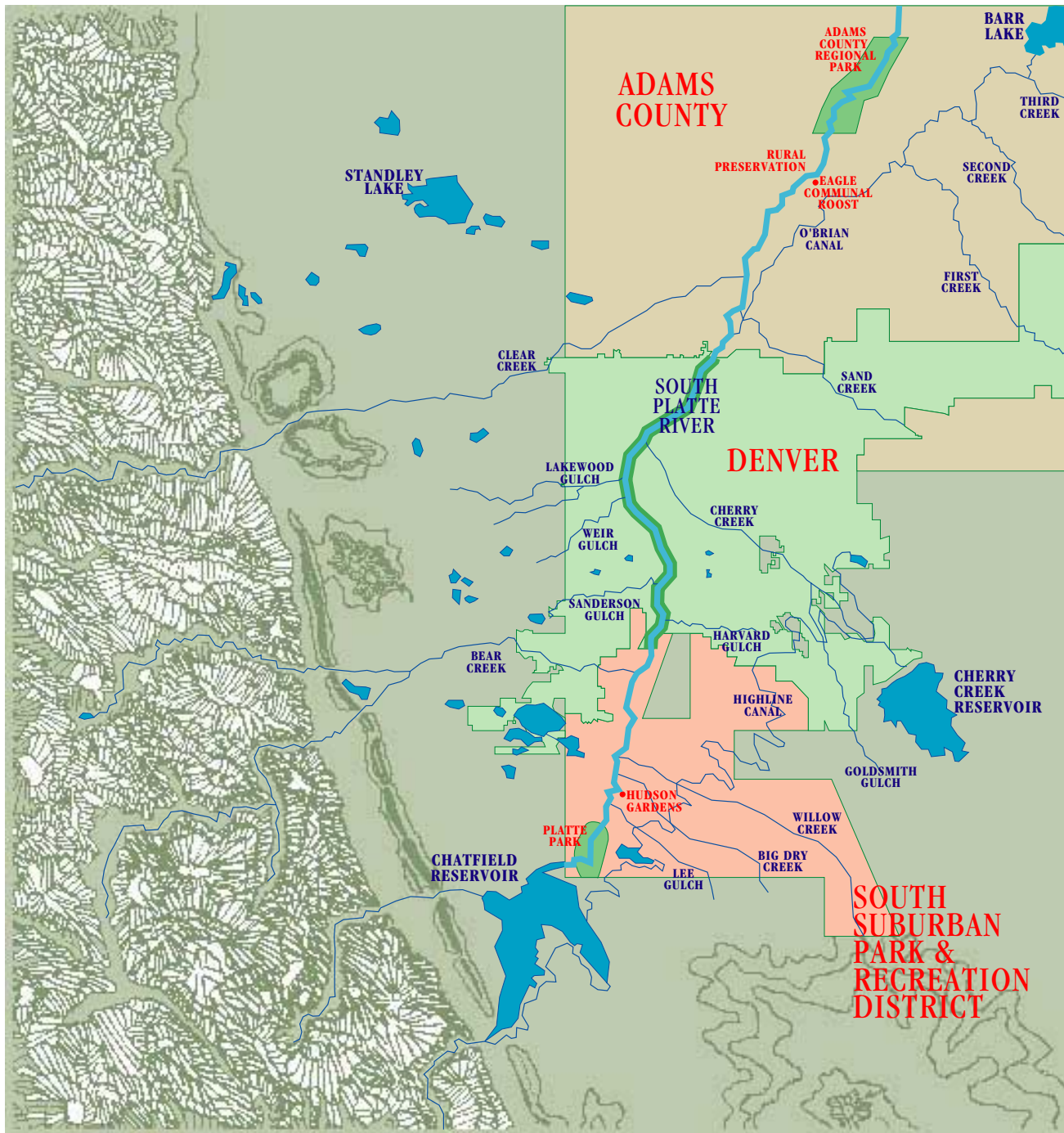


Making the transition from the ignored, polluted “sad, bewildered nothing of a River” as James Michener called it, to the attractive community amenity it is becoming today has taken time, leadership and care. In 1965 a large flood brought renewed attention to and interest in the South Platte River as a force in the city. In 1974, following another, smaller flood, the South Platte Development Council was formed by Denver Mayor Bill McNichols to advance the protection and improvement of the River as an urban amenity. This led, in turn, to the development of the South Platte River Greenway Project, and the nonprofit Greenway Foundation to administer it. The greenway project led to the clean-up and improvement of the river, and adjacent parks and trails, as a recreational resource for the city, which in turn invited increased public interest and investment in the Corridor’s well-being. Dawning environmental consciousness also led to increased interest in the river as a resource for wildlife and native plant communities. Interest and trails along other drainages and tributaries to the Platte soon followed (e.g. along Cherry Creek, Clear Creek, and Bear Creek) and Denver became a national leader in the restoration and development of urban greenways.



Over 20 years later, in 1996, Mayor Wellington Webb established the Mayor’s South Platte River Commission to extend that legacy and to improve upon it. A formal coalition of city agencies, non-profits and diverse community representatives, the Commission has worked together to bring the vision for the greenway up to date. It has raised millions of dollars for refurbishment of established parks and trails, added hundreds of acres of new and improved parks and helped to restore native wildlife habitat throughout the 10.5 mile stretch of the River that falls within the City and County of Denver. It has benefited from an increased appreciation of the regional nature of river health and management issues, of the relationship of “Denver’s River” to the broader South Platte River Basin watershed, and of the critical role of improved water quality in realizing other goals for the corridor.





SOUTH PLATTE RIVER AND SURROUNDING REGION

*what are
the purposes
of this
plan?*



What are the Purposes of This Plan?

This plan is intended to provide a framework for decision-making and management of the South Platte River Corridor into the future. It is a framework because it describes a broad set of goals and objectives and a structure through which they can be achieved. It does not lay out in explicit or technical detail how the River will be managed, or by whom, to accomplish those objectives. That will continue to be the role of a variety of management agencies that will utilize this framework to coordinate their activities on the Corridor.

The Commission intends this document to provide guidance for continued multi-objective management and project coordination in the corridor, and support for resource managers and their partners toward the realization of a common vision. This document does not dictate to any agency or group. Instead it seeks to create a voluntary forum to encourage cooperation and collaborative efforts, which will enhance the South Platte River Corridor as a premier resource. It provides recommendations for protecting and extending the accomplishments of the Commission through creation of a permanent body within the City (the South Platte River Corridor Council), focused on balancing and integrating a variety of objectives for the South Platte River.

Herein we describe the Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives for the corridor, which should be evaluated and updated periodically. Finally this plan provides a means of building on the accomplishments of the past 5 years and of ensuring that momentum is maintained by providing guidance and a structure to continue progress.



planning process



Planning Process

In the spring of 1999, the Commission found itself at a crossroads. With many projects near completion, a new South Platte Maintenance District being formed and a Natural Areas program underway within Denver Parks & Recreation, the Commission took stock of its accomplishments and turned a collective eye toward the future. It was determined that, before the Commission could “sunset” its activities, it should clearly articulate and summarize its vision, goals and objectives for the future, and should consider how its multi-party coordinating and advocacy roles could be institutionalized and continued. This Long Range Management Framework is the result.

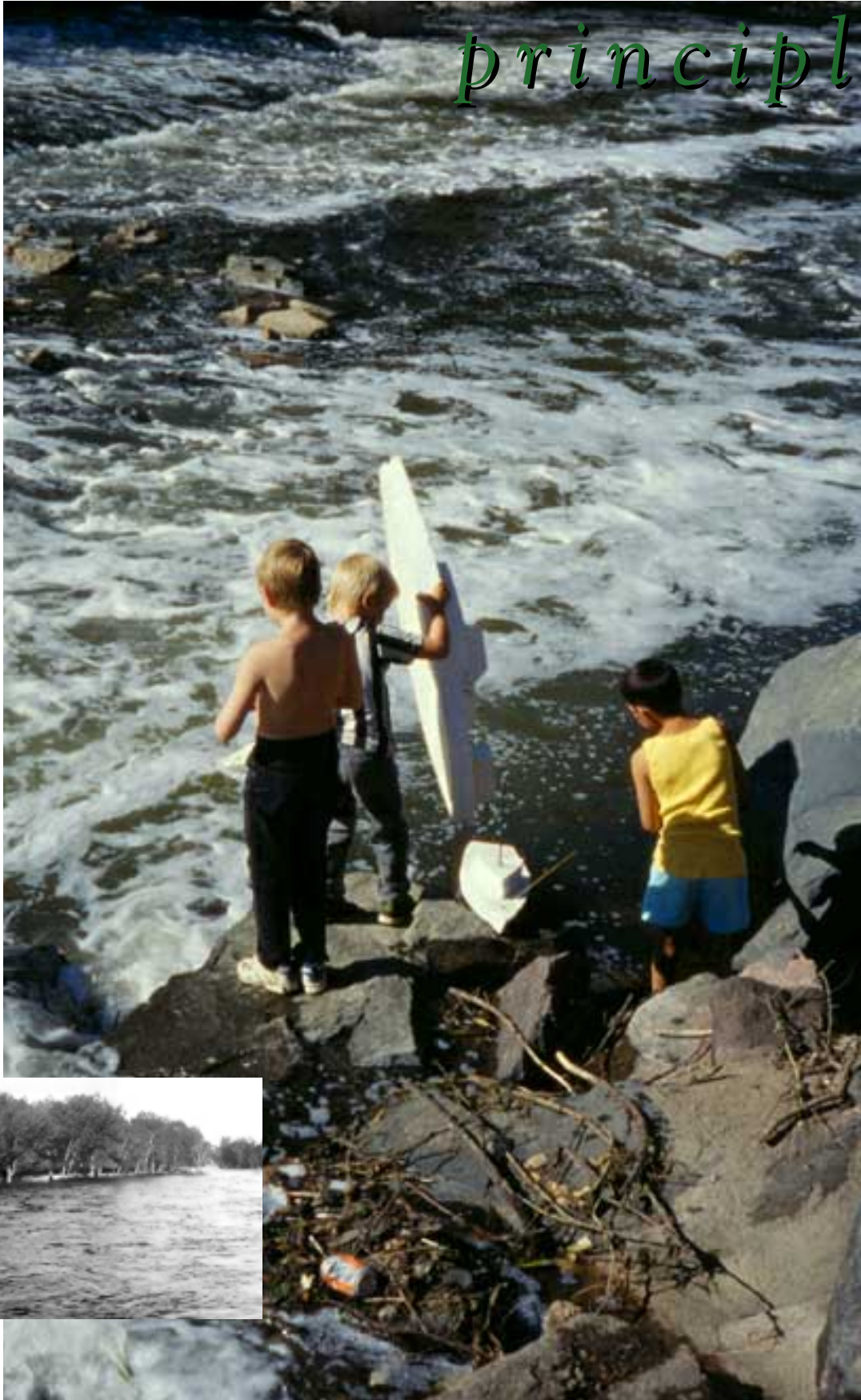
The planning process spanned 6 months, from December 1999 through May 2000. It featured a series of five carefully planned “core group meetings,” featuring a “core” of staff and commission people as well as topic-specific participants. Each meeting focused on a different topic central to the long-range management of the corridor including Management Philosophy, Management Structure, Budget and Capacity, Public Involvement/ Public Safety and Metro Cooperation. Additionally, project leads met regularly with Commissioners and agency staff, and periodically with groups on particular issues (e.g. wildlife conservation, law enforcement).

Key tasks included:

- Gathering and organizing the diverse Goals and Objectives developed for the South Platte River Corridor over the past five years on a variety of subject matters.
- Inventorying and summarizing responsibilities of all parties currently involved in managing diverse aspects of the river corridor.
- Determining how to coordinate management activities and new projects formally .
- Gaining agreement on core values for corridor management (water quality, flood control and protecting/enhancing natural values whenever possible). Understanding and summarizing multiple objectives for which the corridor is managed; where they overlap, complement or conflict with one another and how to resolve ongoing issues.
- Identifying next steps – how to implement recommendations contained herein.



guiding principles



Guiding Principles

These overarching principles represent common ground for the future direction of the River Corridor. They are intended to ensure that the River Corridor is recognized and enhanced as a central community resource for generations to come. These principles are referred to throughout the document, as the “umbrella” under which more specific goals and objectives are to be applied.

- 1 The South Platte is the natural, recreational, and cultural backbone and framework for the region. It demands special attention to sustain and enhance its multiple values for the community.
- 2 Management is a shared responsibility between a number of partners, including government entities, nonprofit organizations, the private sector and community groups. We need to build the capacity to coordinate and engage all of these groups constructively as partners in managing the River Corridor.
- 3 In managing the South Platte River Corridor, Denver should strive to balance and integrate social and natural functions and values of the River. The river should be managed to sustain a variety of uses, including recreation, community events, and education, and to restore it in support of increased species diversity and a continuous wildlife habitat corridor, with enhancing water quality, public safety and flood mitigation as overriding priorities.
- 4 A single and comprehensive development review process should be developed to accommodate and respond to multiple use goals for projects in or adjacent to the Corridor to help ensure that activities and projects are consistent with the Goals and Objectives described in this document.
- 5 Adaptive management is the primary strategy that will be utilized for balancing the protection of natural values and the demand for human activities (i.e. through baseline inventories, ongoing measurement, monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation of management approaches, and through institutional learning).
- 6 We should seek regional cooperation with our neighbors throughout the watershed on projects and management objectives of mutual benefit in order to increase overall funding, cost effectiveness, visibility and support for the river and its watershed.
- 7 The South Platte River Corridor Council will be a forum where the variety of agencies, community interests and stakeholders meet to protect and advocate the vision, define common direction, review projects and work to resolve differences and conflicts. Its role is to balance interests and integrate activities for overall community benefit. It will not dictate or regulate actions, but rather will derive its power from the participation, collaboration and common vision of its members.







"The world

we have created today

as a result of

our thinking thus far

has problems

which cannot be solved

by thinking the way

we thought

when we created them."

~ Albert Einstein

Achieving the Vision

The Long Range Management Framework





The Long Range Management Framework: Achieving the Vision — Current Conditions and Recommendations

■ Overview

This section represents the heart of the Management Framework — it takes the planning work done by the Commission to date and breaks it down into topical areas. Topics are grouped under three overarching strategies. Each section provides a summary of current conditions and issues, followed by goals and objectives to achieve the vision for the corridor described in the introduction.

Strategy 1: Create an Effective and Coordinated Management Strategy

- Management Philosophy: Natural Areas Designation and Management Guidelines
- Management Structure: The South Platte River Corridor Council

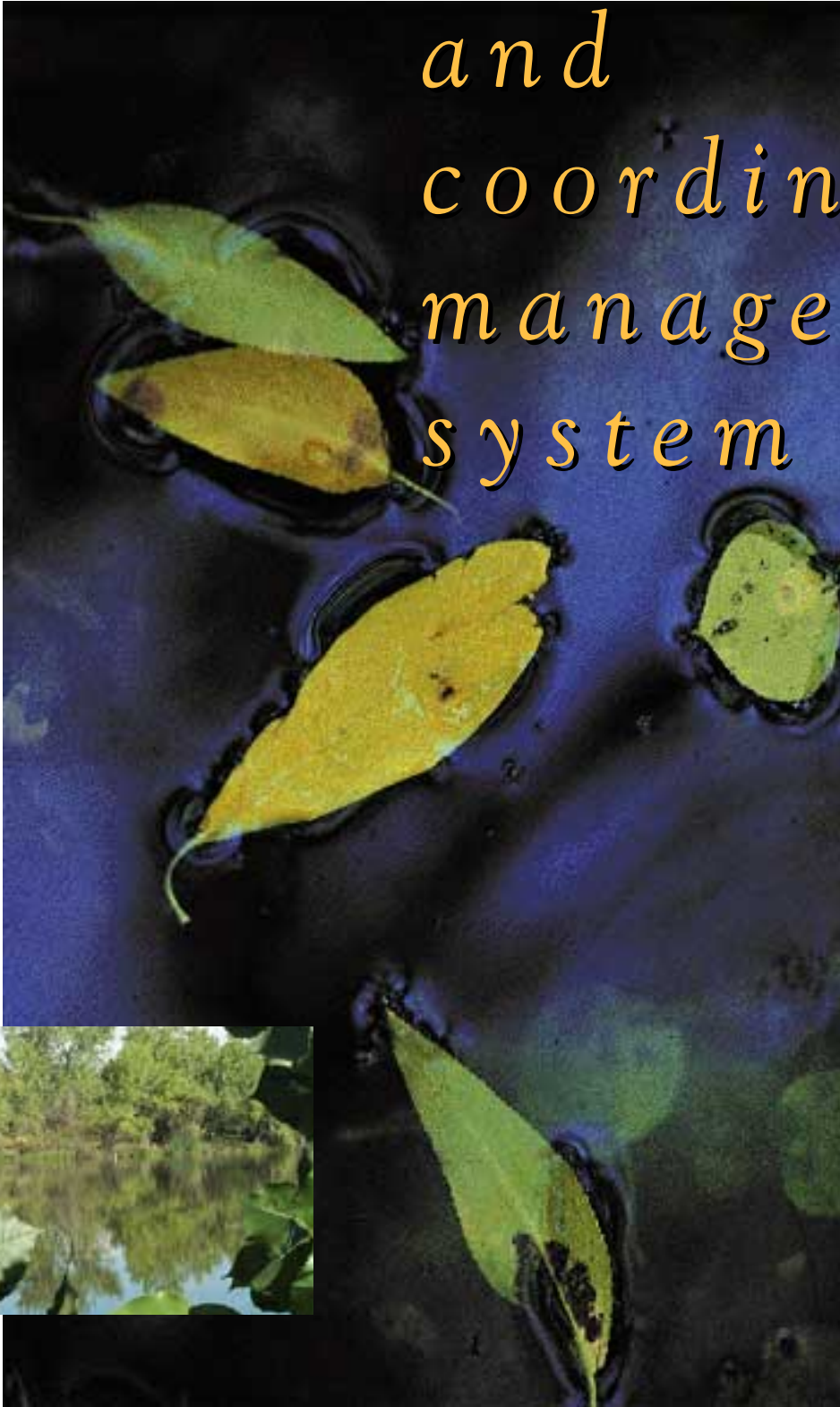
Strategy 2: Improve the River for People, Recreation and Wildlife through Integrated and Balanced Management

- Adaptive Management of Physical Resources
- Public Safety
- Addressing Regional Issues Through Metro Cooperation
- Public Involvement and Communication

Strategy 3: Develop the Resources and Capacity Necessary to Meet Challenges



*create
an effective
and
coordinated
management
system*



STRATEGY I: Create an Effective and Coordinated Management System

■ Management Philosophy

Current Conditions ■ The South Platte River Corridor has long been managed by multiple parties toward a variety of desired, often functional ends. Currently, Denver Parks & Recreation maintains the greenway trail and associated parkland. The Wastewater Management Division of the Denver Department of Public Works manages stormwater flows and works with the regional Urban Drainage and Flood Control District on local and regional flood control and river restoration issues and projects. Denver Environmental Health is responsible for evaluating and promoting the overall health of the River and its tributaries. The Denver Planning Office reviews and approves development in neighborhoods adjacent to the river. The Denver Water Department is responsible for managing flow volume and timing in the corridor, in coordination with state and federal authorities. The non-profit Greenway Foundation and other private groups have initiated and led a variety of educational programs, events and other activities in the corridor. While these groups may have been aware of each other and on occasion collaborated, no common approach or vision has guided their management decisions.

The Mayor's South Platte River Commission has effectively brought these parties and many others to the same table. As a result, the Commission has not only produced better and more coordinated projects, but has also developed a project approach whereby "bottom line" issues such as water quality, environmental health, public safety and flood control can be integrated into decision-making from the beginning. Integration of projects has also made it possible to attract increased funding support from outside parties and to improve project design and benefits. An example of this type of benefit is the funding received from Great Outdoors Colorado and others to support development of a continuous wildlife habitat corridor and buffer zone that also supports water quality, education and limited recreation opportunities.

A repeated challenge in this process has been the absence of any formally adopted written objectives or guidelines to use in project review and evaluation. The Long Range Management Framework Planning process was undertaken in response to that challenge.

A first step in the management planning process was to develop agreement on an overall management philosophy for the corridor. A variety of corridor uses and values were inventoried and summarized. Improvement and maintenance of water quality, flood mitigation, public safety and ecological health were defined as "core values" integral to any project undertaken on the corridor. There was agreement that any management philosophy should incorporate these values, while accommodating other objectives (i.e. recreation, community development, education, etc) wherever possible.





It was also agreed that an “Adaptive Management” approach would provide the flexibility, checks and balances needed to experiment with new approaches and to achieve these core values over time. Adaptive Management is the process of defining a set of management values, taking full measure of the resource to be managed (i.e. with a baseline inventory), and identifying and applying management strategies toward desired ends. Periodic monitoring and evaluation allow managers to judge the effectiveness of management approaches being employed and to adjust or adapt their strategies accordingly.

The Commission agreed that more formal Corridor land use and management guidelines would help managers to achieve multi-objective goals. A variety of approaches were considered to institutionalize these values, including classifying appropriate uses for the river by segment, or the application of “one size fits all” guidelines to the entire corridor. The recommended approach encourages the use of the City Natural Areas Ordinance to designate the entire corridor as a Natural Area.

Under that law, City Natural Areas are to be identified and legally designated in areas with special natural resources values and will be managed differently than traditional parks. City Natural Areas may be designated as “Active Use,” “Preservation” or “Conservation and Restoration” Natural Areas. All three designations recognize and seek to accommodate the unique management challenges of areas with natural values, but each allows for different levels and types of public uses. An Active Use designation allows for a wide range of recreational activities within a Natural Area, a Conservation and Restoration Area limits uses and access somewhat and a Preservation Area seeks to keep people out of areas of special ecological significance.

On May 9, 2000, the South Platte Commission officially approved the following recommendation:



Recommended: That, in recognition of its special values for water quality and wildlife habitat as well as recreational and other uses, the entire 10.5 miles of the South Platte River Corridor in Denver be designated and managed as a City Natural Area. It is further recommended that the majority of the Corridor be classified as an Active Use Natural Area, with areas in need of special protection to be determined for designation as Preservation Areas, or Conservation and Restoration Areas, as appropriate.

Since this is a new process, there is a need for community education regarding the Natural Areas program and its benefits — i.e., why some open land is not “just a park,” has different benefits and involves different restrictions on use. (please see Appendix for more information on natural areas classifications)

Management Philosophy Goals and Objectives

Goals

- 1 Use Denver Natural Areas designation and categories to guide management and to delineate appropriate uses and protection approaches throughout the corridor.
- 2 Develop clear management objectives for lands in the Corridor that require either special protection or special management to retain or support important values.
- 3 Apply an adaptive management approach to all aspects of corridor management, building on lessons learned from the successes and failures experienced in meeting multiple objectives.
- 4 Develop the South Platte River program as a model for the application of cooperative decision-making and management approaches to other city drainages and the broader regional watershed over time.

Objectives

- 1 Designate the entire South Platte River corridor through Denver as a City Natural Area. Determine areas that may require higher levels of protection through designation of Conservation or Preservation natural areas.
- 2 Develop and publish a South Platte River District Strategic Plan describing an adaptive management strategy, including both short term and long term goals for the new South Platte River District. Seek broad input to ensure plan's responsiveness to multiple agreed-upon objectives for the Corridor.
- 3 Ensure adequate resources and capacity within agencies to pursue an adaptive management strategy.
- 4 Develop operational guidelines specific to the South Platte River for use by the South Platte River Maintenance District, the Wastewater Management Division, Urban Drainage and Flood Control District and others. Coordinate maintenance efforts between agencies to enhance natural areas, wildlife and river management.
- 5 Provide staff training in all relevant agencies in support of identified goals and an adaptive management approach.
- 6 Create a centralized database containing information on recreational uses, fish and wildlife resources and habitat, hydrology, water rights, and water quality for use by corridor managers.



These maps are representative of the types of land use along the South Platte Corridor, and have been prepared by the Natural Areas program. They are intended to assist in decision making on the SPR Corridor, the entirety of which may be designated as a natural area.

The maps depict Corridor stretches with land uses as 1) managed park; 2) natural areas; 3) trails; and, 4) sandbars.



- 7 Engage, educate, challenge and provide opportunities for community groups, stakeholders, nonprofit organizations, neighborhoods and other constituencies to participate in taking care of this special resource. Develop partnerships, education programs and public outreach opportunities.

■ Management Structure

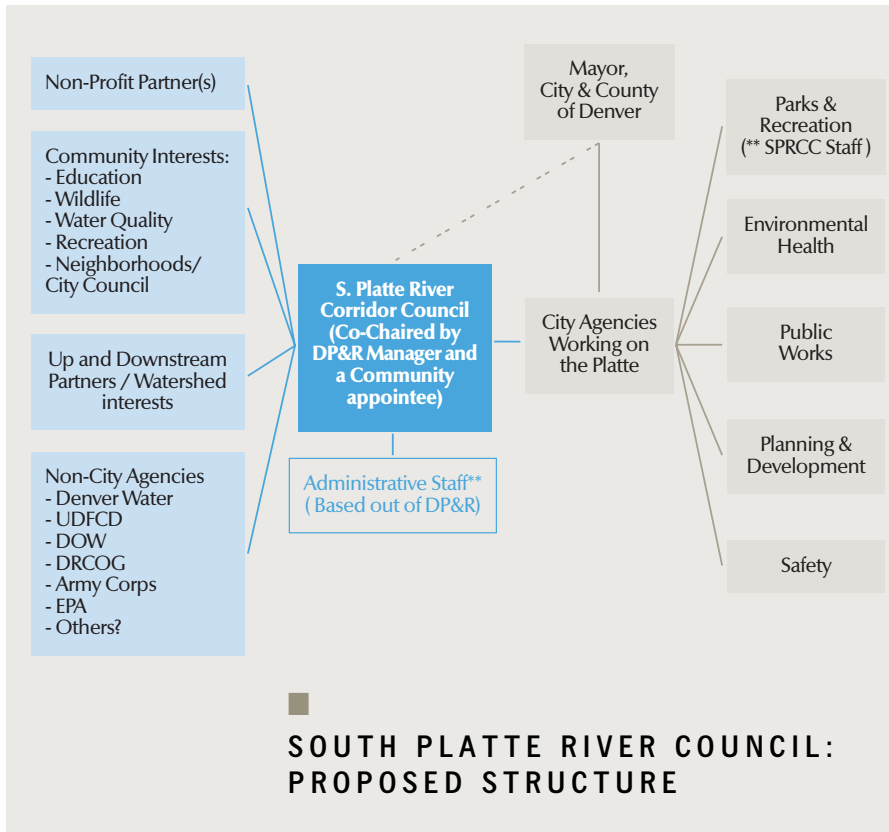
Current Conditions ■ Coordination of management and project development in the corridor has historically been piecemeal and happenstance. The creation and operation of the Mayor's South Platte River Commission has been an important first step toward the realization of an integrated and coordinated management approach for the Corridor. The Commission has accomplished great strides toward this goal, as described in the introduction above. The challenge that remains is to ensure continued coordination and multi-objective planning by the many stakeholders and agencies with interests and responsibilities in the River Corridor, following the cessation of the Mayor's South Platte River Commission.

Several possible institutional models were considered as a means to achieve this goal, including the creation of an autonomous government entity, the creation of a new non-profit working in partnership with the City, and the creation of a new division within Denver Parks & Recreation. Key components identified for success of any structure included the need to:

- Avoid “reinventing the wheel” or replicating existing agency roles and authority on the River.
- Create a “neutral forum,” a coordinating body for the river that works between agencies and interests as an empowered advisor without specific authority over agencies, and provides a primary point of contact for the interested public.
- Allow for equal representation of and investment by multiple agencies working on the River.
- Provide a mechanism for broad-based coordination and review of projects, response to regional issues/ policies; support of programming and public relations.
- Allow for positive contributions by and encourage partnerships with diverse non-profit and private sector interests for advocacy, programs, fundraising and public involvement.
- Support coordination of the many activities related to the River within DP&R as the agency managing the majority of land and natural resources in the corridor. Also support communication/ coordination between and within other managing agencies.

The South Platte River Corridor Council ■ On May 9, 2000 The Commission formally recommended the creation of a South Platte River Corridor Council (SPRCC) to allow for a “neutral” forum and ensure continued broad investment and support for South Platte River projects across agencies:

Recommended: That a South Platte River Corridor Council (SPRCC) be created as the successor to the Mayor’s South Platte River Commission. This body will be broadly representative of diverse stakeholders (both public and private) in the management of the River Corridor, and will be empowered by City ordinance. It will be co-chaired by the Manager of Denver Parks & Recreation and a Mayoral-appointed community leader and will be staffed administratively through Denver Parks & Recreation. It will exist to promote and implement a commonly agreed-upon and adopted Vision and Long Range Management Framework for the South Platte River Corridor within the City and County of Denver.





Management Structure Goals and Objectives

Goals

- 1** Create a South Platte River Corridor Council (SPRCC), empowered by ordinance and appointed by the Mayor, for multi-objective project development, review and coordination that enables diverse and interested groups to work effectively and collaboratively toward identified goals and objectives.*
 - 2** Create new staff capacity for program development, implementation and coordination activities of the SPRCC.
-

Objectives

- 1** Develop and support passage of city ordinance creating a South Platte River Corridor Council; Sunset Mayor's Commission.*
- 2** Create a detailed, coordinated and clearly communicated development review process through the SPRCC, addressing multiple activity and protection goals (e.g., public safety, water quality, impacts on terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat, impacts on existing land uses and recreational uses). Work with the City to implement appropriate development review for River Corridor.
- 3** Develop capacity and process to periodically set annual and long-term priorities for budgeting, capital projects, programs, fundraising, etc.
- 4** Coordinate all efforts of the South Platte River Corridor Council with the relevant city, regional, state and federal agencies, as appropriate.
- 5** Coordinate public and media relations between all parties working in the corridor, through the South Platte River Corridor Council. Identify and establish a point of contact for public information related to River activities.

** Denotes activities that need to take place prior to the creation of the SPRCC, by either the Commission or City staff.*

Overview of Proposed South Platte River Corridor Council Membership and Functions

Functions:

- 1 Coordinate entities with corridor management responsibility.
- 2 Coordinate project planning, design and capital construction. Serve as clearinghouse, coordinate review of, and response to major projects and proposals. (Note: Council has no authority itself, but relies on the authority and cooperation of its members to realize its goals).
- 3 Community outreach and stakeholder involvement in policy, projects, programs and management direction.
- 4 Keeper of the vision: maintaining integrity of multiple community objectives, quality assurance, transcend political change.
- 5 Advocate for the river within City administration.
- 6 Communications
- 7 Fundraising
- 8 Inter-Governmental Relations (regional, state and federal level coordination).
- 9 Review and approve annual work plan for staff.

Membership may include:

Co-Chairs: Manager of DP&R, Community Member Appointed by Mayor

Voting Structure: TBD (voting, non-voting, and advisory members)

Terms: TBD

City Agencies: Parks & Recreation, Public Works, Environmental Health, Safety, and Planning.

Council Members: Representative Districts, (#3,7,9)

Public Agency Partners: UDFCD, Denver Water Department, Metro Waste Water, Adams County Parks, South Suburban Park and Recreation District, Army Corps of Engineers, EPA, NPS.

Community Interest representatives: neighborhoods, recreation, Environment/wildlife, business, organized groups representing Tributaries of the South Platte (e.g., Cherry Creek, Sand Creek, etc.)

Non-Profit Partners (non-voting): Greenway Foundation, others (TBD)

Conditions: Include Conflict-of-Interest provision for membership.

Established By: Ordinance

Staff Functions: Administers activities of SPRCC, coordinates projects, operates clearinghouse, fundraises for projects, coordinates with member agency staffs on programs and projects, maintains non-profit contacts, pursues acquisition of lands, periodically reviews SPRCC goals and objectives with Council. Work plan reviewed annually by Council.

Location: Denver Parks & Recreation

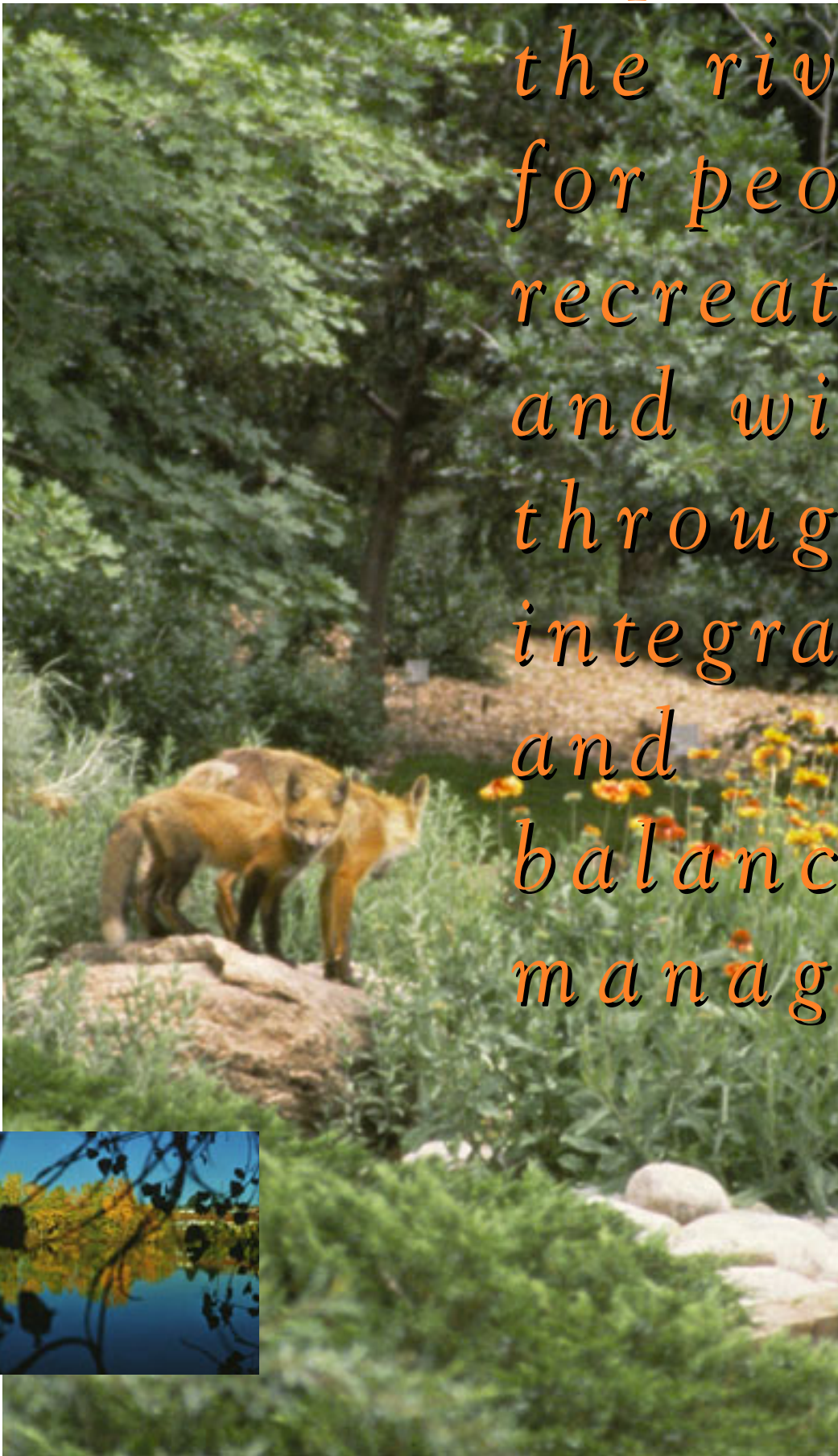
Budget and Sources of Funds: Administrative/ office support through Denver Parks & Rec.

Project funding: Administratively funded through DP&R. Project specific funding TBD

Meeting Format: Quarterly Meetings for Functions of Council, Subcommittees work between sessions (e.g., regional South Platte issues, watershed/ water quality issues, education/ interpretation, etc.).



*improve
the river
for people,
recreation
and wildlife
through
integrated
and
balanced
management*



STRATEGY II: Improve the River for People, Recreation and Wildlife through Integrated and Balanced Management

Current Conditions ■ The South Platte River in Denver is managed for multiple activities and objectives by a variety of interests. Additionally, the River Corridor itself changes in character throughout the 10.5-mile Denver stretch (See Instream Issues report Table in Appendix X). Different areas of the river represent different opportunities and challenges — the critical question is how to find the appropriate balance between various uses in each area, while protecting core values throughout. In this section we address this issue by identifying goals and strategies for:

- Adaptive Management of Natural Resources
 - Terrestrial Wildlife
 - Recreation and Land Use
 - Water Quality/Flow, Flood Mitigation and Aquatic Habitat
- Public Safety
- Metro Cooperation.
- Public Involvement
 - Education
 - Volunteers and Events
 - Employment
 - Public Relations and Information

The South Platte River Corridor, for purposes of this plan, is defined as 330 acres of land and water within the 100 year Floodplain (consistent with the 1997 Greenway Ordinance and 2000 SPRMD Strategic Plan). The resources in the Corridor provide a wide range of uses and benefits for both people and wildlife, with multiple uses often overlapping in any single area. For example, at any given point in the corridor there may be a trail bordered on either side by a wildlife habitat area and formal park/ residential development, with a storm drain, grade control drop structure and boating area in the River. Successful multi-objective management requires that all uses be considered in the management of any single resource, with water quality and public safety as overriding priorities. A case study below highlights some of the related challenges and opportunities.





Case Study: Multi-Objective Management for Recreation

The recreational trail that follows the South Platte River through Denver and into the suburbs on either side is, in the mind of the public, synonymous with the South Platte River Greenway. The trail, developed one mile and one bridge at a time over a period of 20 years by the Greenway Foundation and Denver Parks & Recreation, is many things to many people. It provides a commuter thoroughway, an escape from city stress, access to the river for education, wildlife viewing and boaters, and a venue for biking, skating and walking. On summer days at peak use, the most popular sections of the trail (near the confluence of the South Platte and Cherry Creek) are used by thousands of people. The trail represents the primary means of bringing people to the River to appreciate and learn about its beauty and value. It also presents a source of conflict: between different types of recreational users (i.e. bird watchers and high-speed bikers or skaters), and between trail users and wildlife. Some areas are at risk of being “loved to death.”

Aquatic recreation is also of strong and growing interest in the Corridor. With the proposed replacement of the Zuni Power Plant dam, the entire stretch of river through the city will be navigable by raft, canoe or kayak. Increasing numbers of businesses are promoting boating on the river, through sales and rental of equipment nearby, or through guided trips and lessons on the River. Facilities constructed recently at Confluence Park and Commons Park encourage people to get close to the water, and on hot summer afternoons, dozens of children and families can be observed getting relief from the heat by swimming in the waters of the Confluence. There is value in the public recognizing and “reclaiming” the Platte as a recreational amenity, but such uses can be impeded by poor water quality. Water quality in the River is highly variable, can change dramatically in a short period of time, and is not suitable for sustained full body contact. The challenge is to encourage interest in and use of the river in appropriate ways, while educating the public about the public health risks associated with exposure. Improving water quality in the River will require metro cooperation, and a watershed-level approach, engaging other communities along on the Platte’s tributaries, as well as along the River itself.

The South Platte has been home to a wide variety of wildlife species far longer than it has been an urban river. The opportunity to observe wildlife along the corridor is valued highly by the community, and the presence of aquatic life in the river provides a recreational amenity in and of itself. In planning for recreation along the River, impacts on

wildlife habitat, and wildlife-human interactions should be considered. For example, recreational lighting may be timed to turn off at night to support use of the corridor by wildlife. Trail and aquatic recreation improvements may be planned with an eye toward supporting or at least not destroying habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species. High intensity trails could be located on the opposite side of the River from wildlife habitat buffer areas where possible. Known nesting areas should be avoided by recreational and educational users.

Public perceptions of safety on the River are a factor in public use and support for Corridor activities and improvements. In general, attitudes towards safety directly correlate to “eyes on the corridor” — that is, the presence of other (legal) users. While the confluence area is widely used and considered safe, some of the less used sections of the trail and corridor are considered less safe if alone or after dark. River corridors often attract transient and homeless populations. Anecdotal evidence from the Police Department suggests that, while illegal activities probably do take place in the corridor, violent crime is rare, and most trail users, mobile on bicycles or skates, are unaffected. Police on mountain bikes report that corridor users welcome and desire a police presence. Increased recreational activities, both terrestrial and aquatic, will require increased support from law enforcement officials as well — to resolve conflicts between users and to ensure the safety of users (i.e. boating accidents). The corridor, as a unique type of urban amenity, may require alternative approaches to regular police protection (i.e. call boxes, special lighting, etc). Evaluating alternatives is one role of the SPRCC.

Public Involvement — volunteers, events, youth programs, signage, etc. play a role in engaging people who use the Corridor in its ongoing protection and improvement. The recent coordination and development of youth programs has also contributed to a new generation of stewards and River enthusiasts. Ongoing challenges include funding, continuation and development of partnerships and development of a single clear and accessible source of information about the River. It would also be helpful to know more about who is using the corridor for active and passive recreation, how and when, for management, marketing, education and security purposes.

As this case study shows, planning for management of one corridor use (recreation), if integrated and balanced with other uses, will create a broader range of benefits for all users. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.





■ Overall Goals for Integrated and Balanced Management

- Encourage a variety of uses of the River Corridor — natural, recreational, cultural and educational — and develop ways to manage these uses consistent with the environmental health of the River, water quality, public safety and flood mitigation.
- Ensure careful planning, coordination and implementation of activities and investments in the river corridor in support of common vision and guiding principles.
- Develop and utilize a comprehensive development review mechanism to ensure compatibility of new projects with multiple interests and objectives, consistent with the vision and guiding principles described above.
- Encourage the economic revitalization of adjacent neighborhoods and communities and reconnect them to the River in meaningful ways.
- Work cooperatively with public and private landowners to voluntarily protect important lands along the river in perpetuity.
- Make management of the South Platte River a shared community responsibility through public education, outreach, information and activities/programs.



Adaptive Management Strategies

The topics covered in this section represent the physical resources of the River Corridor (as contrasted with programmatic elements). As such, they are the primary targets for an adaptive management approach by corridor managers, and are the areas where management will require the greatest degree of balance and integration in order to be successful on all fronts.

An adaptive management approach involves the adoption of a scientific baseline inventory of resources and their relative health/quality. Management strategies are then developed based on goals for the given resource or area in question (i.e. based on Natural Areas/ wildlife habitat goals, recreation goals and/or water quality and flood mitigation goals). Periodic monitoring allows managers to gauge their success at managing the resources in question toward the desired ends, and to change or adapt their management strategies accordingly.

Terrestrial Wildlife Goals and Objectives

Goals

- 1 Provide and maintain a viable, riparian habitat corridor for wildlife movement to attract and sustain a wide variety of terrestrial wildlife.
- 2 Provide South Platte Corridor users with varied and ongoing opportunities to view native plants, wildflowers and wildlife, and understand their needs, while participating in the appreciation and protection of native species along the corridor.
- 3 Avoid actions that have high potential to create conflict between wildlife and people.



Objectives

- 1 Coordinate work between management agencies to monitor and manage wildlife populations in support of adaptive management goals. Establish baseline inventory of terrestrial wildlife in Corridor and monitor periodically for species diversity, population numbers, and overall health, as well as compatibility between recreation and wildlife.
- 2 Maintain and develop existing GIS database as an information and management tool.
- 3 Achieve width and function of greenway as a wildlife corridor through the use of conservation easements or similar tools for land protection throughout corridor.
- 4 A multi-storied vegetative buffer should be established and maintained on at least one side of the river for wildlife habitat (150' minimum width is recommended).
- 5 Promote compatible human activities within or adjacent to wildlife buffer zones (e.g., hiking/ foot traffic, wildlife viewing and passive recreation) and support opportunities for public education and participation in wildlife conservation. Separate human activity areas where possible to reduce human-wildlife conflicts. Develop terrestrial wildlife viewing sites and interpretive signs whenever possible.
- 6 Maintain healthy populations of native plant communities and wildlife species throughout the corridor by generating, improving and protecting habitat that meets basic wildlife needs: escape, shelter, water, food, reproduction and movement.
- 7 Restore riparian areas with native species in order to create multi-storied vegetative structure. Discourage the growth of noxious, invasive plant species.
- 8 Develop/publish habitat restoration guidelines for the corridor for private developers, urban planners, landowners and land managers.





Recreation Goals and Objectives

Goals

- 1 Maintain, enhance and expand the Platte River trail system to provide connected, accessible and safe recreational opportunities.
- 2 Provide a safe, aesthetically pleasing, multi-use corridor for non-motorized recreation.
- 3 Minimize conflicts between diverse users of corridor.

Objectives

- 1 Consider impacts on the river corridor's terrestrial wildlife, riparian, and aquatic habitat of proposed recreational developments to ensure proper resource protection.
- 2 Promote trail user education including:
 - a) improving trail informational signage and
 - b) working with the press, schools and other trail user groups to promote etiquette.
- 3 Establish consistent trail design and identification standards throughout the Platte Corridor — locally and regionally, if possible.
- 4 Provide for safe and dependable boating, kayaking, and rafting opportunities in appropriate locations, consistent with public health standards.
- 5 Improve sport fishing and limited recreation opportunities through management of waterway, consistent with public health standards.
- 6 Reduce user conflicts through a combination of physical improvements, education and enforcement, including improved design and construction, uniform and consistent signage; clear and publicized user etiquette, targeted education to user groups. Design and construct alternate trails (high volume and soft surface) for specific users and in high volume areas. Construct trail pullouts to minimize user conflicts at points-of-interest, boat put-ins and take-outs, etc., consistent with public health standards
- 7 Determine multi-agency strategy to address management and liability issues related to water quality and aquatic recreation.
- 8 Develop a segment or segments of the river specifically for boating through the maintenance of a low-flow channel.



Flood Mitigation, Water Quality, Base Water Flow and Aquatic Habitat Goals and Objectives

Goals

- 1 Preserve and enhance water quality for public health and wildlife protection.
- 2 Provide water of sufficient quantity at the appropriate times to support practical urban and recreational uses of the River and to support the plants, fish, and wildlife appropriate for the South Platte River in Denver.
- 3 Develop and enhance a healthy native riverine system through Denver characterized by a diverse and abundant aquatic community.
- 4 Take a comprehensive watershed approach to water quality and flood control issues, with regional cooperation.



Objectives

- 1 Support and work cooperatively between agencies to mitigate flooding, improve water quality, and improve sustainable flow and habitat of the South Platte and its tributaries in the Denver metro area. Coordinate activities related to flood mitigation, water quality and water flow to maximize the potential for aquatic habitat improvements.
- 2 Integrate aquatic habitat improvements into new river construction projects whenever possible (e.g., holding habitat, tributary backwaters, pool riffle sequences, etc.)
- 3 Strive to meet or exceed State of Colorado Water Quality Control Commission designated use classification and water quality standards and continue refinement of the Water Quality Management Plan.
- 4 Educate and communicate with the public about water quality and water flow.
- 5 Promote flood mitigation activities that incorporate natural flood retention, encourage native vegetation, protect neighborhoods and minimize public and private losses due to flood conditions.
- 6 Explore opportunities to reduce sediment loading through implementation of best management practices for in-stream and riparian construction projects, including vegetative filtration and constructed wetlands.





■ Public Safety

Goal and Objectives

Goal

- 1 Maximize public safety related to a variety of uses and activities throughout the Greenway.

Objectives

- 1 Establish a consistent and obvious enforcement presence on the South Platte. Utilize District liaisons as contact points/institutional memory in both Police Department and Fire Department. Support ongoing animal control bicycle patrols. Maintain regular contact with these agencies regarding Corridor needs and City response.
- 2 Assess, evaluate and recommend a range of security options to improve perception and realization of public safety in corridor at all times (e.g., solar call boxes, increased police presence, updated diver team equipment, etc.). Consider special designation of police personnel for SPR Corridor. Assess and recommend improved equipment for Fire Dept. Diver Team consistent with increased public recreational use of waterway.
- 3 Ensure that landowners adjacent to the Corridor maintain lands consistent with existing safety requirements. Provide education about responsibilities and existing laws, land stewardship guidelines and information about who to call if there are problems.
- 4 Through public education and signage, inform the public about water quality hazards and potential risks to corridor users.
- 5 Develop a strategy for public education and communication related to the safety of a range of terrestrial and aquatic recreational activities. Address issues related to enforcement of existing laws, the need for collaboration between multiple agencies involved, and public/user education.

■ Regional Cooperation and Partnership

Goal and Objectives

Goal

- 1 Through better and more regular communication, promote regional cooperation and collaboration on vision, projects, funding, events and resolution of difficult issues.

Objectives

- 1 Use the South Platte River Corridor Council to initiate more regular regional discussion and interaction.
- 2 Define a set of regional issues on which regular sharing of information and plans between regional jurisdictions should occur, including: education, wildlife habitat enhancement and maintenance, safety, neighborhood outreach, boating and water flow, water quality, events and economic development.
- 3 Develop funding strategies for regional projects and issues, i.e. land acquisition.
- 4 Identify governmental jurisdictions and related nonprofit, civic, and environmental interests that should participate in regional discussions.
- 5 Share information and lessons learned on a regional, watershed basis and learn from the experiences of other regional watershed initiatives undertaken elsewhere.





■ Public Involvement

Education Goal and Objectives

Goal

- 1 Make the South Platte River a focal point for environmental and cultural life-long learning, focused on the relationship between people and their environments.
-

Objectives

- 1 Expand hands-on learning and other youth programs in concert with local schools. Maintain and expand current programs to teach youth the value of wildlife conservation and resource stewardship values.
- 2 Expand existing River curriculum to include history and culture and their relationship to natural resources; develop advanced level content for existing curriculum.
- 3 Encourage urban educational institutions to use the South Platte as an environmental learning laboratory.
- 4 Develop and use a guidebook to the Corridor as an education resource.
- 5 Utilize fishing education programs to teach fishing skills and environmental responsibility to 5,000 youth each year.
- 6 Develop adult and family-targeted environmental and wildlife education programs.
- 7 Target seniors for learning opportunities, and use as mentors/teachers or guides.
- 8 Develop signage to support regional connections, guide and teach users about the natural and cultural history and uses of the River, and describe the challenges faced today.
- 9 Develop signage and other educational materials to alert public to water quality concerns and educate them on how they can improve water quality.

Events and Volunteers Goal and Objectives

Goal

- 1 Celebrate the South Platte River as the region's key natural, recreational and cultural backbone through community events, programs and gatherings. Connect people to the River Corridor through meaningful volunteer service and activities that develop a stewardship ethic.



Objectives

- 1 Seek to develop diverse volunteer opportunities — e.g., longer-term commitments for restoration activities, as well as one-time clean-up/maintenance events, through a variety of public and private groups.
- 2 Continue and expand Hands-On Denver activities in the Corridor.
- 3 Encourage groups to adopt trail portions through Adopt-A-Trail
- 4 Sponsor at least 2 major events focused on the Corridor per year. Support events that educate and engage the public.
- 5 Identify and resolve conflicts between City park event guidelines and goals and objectives adopted for the Corridor; create event permit guidelines that require users to behave in a fashion consistent with the vision for the River Corridor. Seek to minimize the negative impacts on natural values and wildlife of any event in the Corridor through siting, guidelines, monitoring and follow-up reports and communication with users.
- 6 Use all river events and volunteer programs, whether publicly or privately sponsored, as public education and public relations opportunities (i.e. through the permitting process).

Employment Goal and Objectives

Goal

- 1 Provide urban youth the opportunity to work, gain career skills and learn about their environment through South Platte River activities.

Objectives

- 1 Create job opportunities for youth that teach career/job skills and opportunities.



- 2 Continue to support South Platte River Ranger and River Guide Programs for Denver youth to help with river cleanup and community service, to provide info and assistance for visitors and to learn rafting skills.
- 3 Work to identify and engage youth corps groups to participate in river cleanup and restoration programs on the River.
- 4 Coordinate existing and new programs in the Corridor with existing Hands On Denver education and training partnership.

Public Relations and Information Goals and Objectives

Goal

- 1 Provide quality information and communication to the public about opportunities and developments on the River to engage the community in achieving our vision and goals.
- 2 Encourage collaboration with neighborhoods along the South Platte River to enhance neighborhood quality, encourage positive connections to the Platte and pride and care for the River.

Objectives

- 1 Understand user populations — complete survey of a variety of corridor users to understand where they are traveling from, how, when and why. Use information gathered as a tool for management, marketing, education, safety and facilities planning.
- 2 Communicate the broad Vision and Guiding Principles for the River Corridor at every opportunity. Describe the results of the investments made in recent years in terms of resources and benefits for both people and wildlife. Help the public understand their potential impacts as stewards/users.
- 3 Create opportunities to encourage broader public support for and involvement in the River Corridor, e.g., develop a set of talking/communications points for Council members and others, a set of slides and a script for speaking engagements, media outlets, etc.
- 4 Identify and pursue possible media opportunities for increased project visibility.

- 5 Continue periodically to prepare and broadly distribute SPR public information and update materials. Develop a consistent design approach/style.
- 6 Develop an information clearinghouse on South Platte River Corridor activities for interested community members and corridor users.
- 7 Create a South Platte River guidebook, including trail and parks maps, natural history, points of interest, etc.
- 8 Continue to develop South Platte River Corridor Website for the project as an information resource.
- 9 Integrate public safety and water quality awareness issues into all relevant communications.
- 10 Develop and support plans at the neighborhood level for developments consistent with the Vision and Guiding Principles for the Corridor (i.e. Sun Valley, Valverde neighborhood projects).



*develop
the resources
and capacity
necessary
to meet
challenges*



STRATEGY III: Develop the Resources and Capacity Necessary to Meet Challenges

Current Conditions ■ The Mayor's South Platte River Commission has operated in a favorable financial climate. Direct support from the Mayor's Office, Denver Wastewater Management and Denver Parks and Recreation, Legacy grant funding from Great Outdoors Colorado and program funding through the Greenway Foundation and others have supported an unprecedented level of investment in the Corridor and related activities. The multi-objective, integrated nature of the Commission's focus has attracted previously unavailable funding and interest in Corridor activities. As major capital construction projects are completed and political change takes place, the funding climate for the Corridor will also change. Administrative staffing for the Council's activities will be budgeted and funded through Denver Parks and Recreation. Ongoing maintenance funding will be budgeted, as it always has, through the relevant agencies. The newly created South Platte River Maintenance District and Natural Areas Program have added considerable capacity and resource for the corridor within Denver Parks and Recreation. The Greenway Foundation is in the process of developing an endowment to ensure its stable operation into the future.

Funding for new initiatives and implementation of this Management Framework will require the development of new funding sources and partnerships. The Council could greatly benefit by partnering with a non-profit organization willing to work in support of its Vision and Guiding Principles. The creation of the Council represents an opportunity for non-profit partner(s) to play an expanded role in the Corridor, as the representative of Community interests and the "keeper of the vision" for the corridor. Relationships with non-profits that offer partnering opportunities and bring new assets or capabilities for enhancing River activities should also be encouraged.



	Potential Assets	Potential Liabilities
Public Sector	Stable Funding Organizational Infrastructure Public Legitimacy Natural Constituents	Chronic Underfunding Bureaucratic Inertia Popular Indifference Narrow Constituencies
Non-Profit Sector	Flexible Funding Organizational Flexibility Community Credibility Broad Constituencies	Unpredictable Funding Lack of Follow-through Unrealistic Expectations Shallow Support

from Chris Walker: *Partnerships for Parks*
Lila Wallace Readers Digest Fund, Urban Parks Program

PUBLIC AND NON-PROFIT SECTOR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES



■ Develop and Maintain Resources and Capacity to Achieve Vision

Goals and Objectives

Goals

- 1 Identify and secure stable sources of funding for South Platte River Corridor Council operations on an ongoing basis, to support program innovations and special project needs throughout the corridor consistent with expressed priorities of the SPRCC.
- 2 Support development of non-profit capacity in support of SPRCC goals and objectives.

Objectives

- 1 Identify one or more nonprofit partners to the SPRCC to help develop, support and advance projects through fundraising, community engagement and technical support.
- 2 Encourage public, private and nonprofit financial and technical support for River projects and activities.
- 3 Coordinate fundraising activities between multiple parties active on the River toward common objectives. Seek to develop and communicate common goals and priorities to share with funders to strengthen overall support.
- 4 Use the SPRCC to coordinate fundraising and use of multiple funding sources to complete priority projects.
- 5 Provide training to agency planning, management and operations personnel in support of good stewardship of the corridor's natural resources.
- 6 Match local funding with GOCO and other public and nonprofit funding sources to achieve acquisition objectives, locally and regionally.
- 7 Hold annual forums on River issues to encourage sharing of ideas, maintenance of vision and programmatic collaborations.
- 8 Use partnerships and public relations activities to enhance local, regional and national visibility for the project for potential partners/funders.



*"A River,
like truth,
will flow on
forever and
have no end."*

~ Confucius

Conclusion



CONCLUSION

■ Summary of Recommendations/ Next Steps

This Framework Plan represents a great deal of progress toward the long term protection and enhancement of the South Platte River as a community amenity. But this is only the beginning. In order to protect the significant legacy of the Mayor's South Platte River Commission, a number of steps should be initiated immediately. These include:

- Create and support early development of the SPRCC — including staff/home at DP&R, ordinance with language to create, appoint and empower it. Complete plans for membership, agenda and process. Implement by the end of 2000.
- Initiate process to designate corridor as a Natural Area and to determine areas requiring non-Active Use designations.
- Determine development review mechanism, process and criteria.
- Inventory existing projects and resources on the Corridor and identify priorities for the next 1-5 years.
- Identify resources development plans— funding and technical — in support of identified priorities.
- Plan for periodic review of Council for fine-tuning and changes, if needed; plan for periodic updating of vision, mission, goals and objectives.
- Support South Platte River Maintenance District and Natural Areas programs in development of adaptive management approach and land use plan for corridor
- Develop adaptive management guidelines for multiple agencies' "Corridor Best Management Practices" and encourage training of all relevant staff.
- Develop and pursue mapping/ GIS strategies.
- Develop a water quality strategy.
- Develop and implement a communications strategy to realize ideal of clearinghouse for public information.

Following these steps will allow the City and its public, private and community partners to protect Mayor Webb's legacy on the South Platte River and to establish a direction whereby that legacy can continue to grow and thrive into the future.

