

# 1 Executive Summary

The South Platte River Heritage Corridor Plan provides a strategic framework for preserving and enhancing the natural, cultural, and recreational qualities of the river corridor through Adams County. The project focuses on a 17-mile stretch of the South Platte from Commerce City to Brighton (the Denver city limits to the Weld County line) and seeks to protect and restore its special qualities. The Heritage Plan outlines a strategic action plan that protects and enhances natural areas, provides new recreational opportunities to the public, forges new public-private partnerships to foster enhanced restoration and reclamation of gravel mining areas, creates a sense of community stewardship for the resource, establishes an environmental education program focusing on the river system, and protects key agricultural lands.

The Heritage Plan reflects the efforts of a broad-based steering committee composed of more volunteers than any previous Adams County planning project. The county involved the public, steering committee, and project partners in a process that included an inventory and analysis of the

South Platte corridor, the development of criteria for setting resource protection priorities, establishment of a vision and concept plan for the corridor (outlined in the box on page 2), and, finally, development of a strategic “Action Plan.”

As a crucial part of plan development, a comprehensive process for evaluating lands and projects was established. This process is designed to determine the relative significance of lands or projects so that the County can focus its energies on those activities that the community has determined to be most important. To create the strategic plan, the following issues were assessed:

- ✓ Does the land meet a conservation or open lands objectives?
- ✓ How soon is development or conversion to other uses likely to occur?
- ✓ Are there program opportunities?
- ✓ Is the land available for protection?

From this process, key areas for Action Plan implementation were identified.



The Action Plan includes short-term steps to be completed before 2000, as well as longer term projects. It outlines specific activities that will accomplish the following eight key objectives:

- 1) Complete the Platte River Trail System,
- 2) Demonstrate the Potential for Multi-Purpose Gravel Mine Restoration,
- 3) Change the Public Image: Gateway Enhancements and Stream Corridor Improvements,
- 4) Protect Natural Lands and Wildlife Habitat,
- 5) Preserve Rural Character,
- 6) Expand Recreational Opportunities,
- 7) Develop Environmental Education and Interpretation Programs,
- 8) Foster Community Stewardship: Engage People in Caring for the River.

The emphasis of the Heritage Corridor Plan is to protect lands, not necessarily acquire them in fee. The use of a variety of creative techniques such as purchase of development rights and conservation easements will limit the funds needed to acquire lands and will minimize county maintenance requirements. Several factors will be important to assuring adequate funding of the Action Plan agenda. The most important factor is identification of a dedicated funding source over the ten-year plan period; such a source will greatly enhance the county's ability to leverage additional support from partners and others. Additional factors include GOCO support and cooperation, cooperation from landowners, and support from Plan partners.

Key principles guiding the plan include:

- **Gateways** located at major road crossings, where enhanced reclamation and trail access announce the corridor as a visual and educational amenity.
- **Buffer along River** protecting natural resources and the floodplain.
- **Platte River Trail** extending the length of Adams County.
- **"Focus Area"** in the central zone of the corridor, which includes all components of the vision, including enhanced reclamation, multiple use water storage, environmental education, recreation, natural area protection, rural character protection and cultural history.
- **Trail Connections** connecting cities, neighborhoods, and key resources (like Barr Lake and Sand Creek) to the Platte River Trail.
- **Rural Character** protection by preserving key agricultural lands and views from Riverdale Road.
- **Expansion of the Regional Park** to become new "gateway" off of 120th.
- **Multiple Use Water Storage** that includes habitat restoration and recreation in future water storage facilities.
- **Expansion of the Conservation Area** to include remainder of cottonwood grove and the adjacent prairie dog town.
- **New County Open Space** that provides enhanced reclamation and new open space lands at 88th.
- **Linkages to Denver's South Platte System** including physical connections, water quality enhancement, and environmental education.

## 2 Introduction

### *Purpose of the South Platte River Heritage Project*

This plan has been prepared with the objective of providing a strategic framework for preserving and enhancing the natural, cultural, and recreational



qualities of the South Platte River Heritage Corridor through Adams County. A Great Outdoors Colorado Planning grant was used to conduct this

project, which focuses on a 17-mile stretch of the South Platte from Commerce City to Brighton. The study area is defined by the Denver city limits to the south, the Weld County line to the north, U.S. Highway 85 to the east, and a variable zone encompassing the immediate South Platte valley to the west. This portion of the South Platte corridor is a study in contrasts, with natural areas and bald eagle roosts next to gravel mines and industrial areas. The time has come to explore options to provide a more consistent direction and to chart a new course for the corridor that protects and restores its special qualities. The Heritage Plan directs this change through a strategic action plan that:

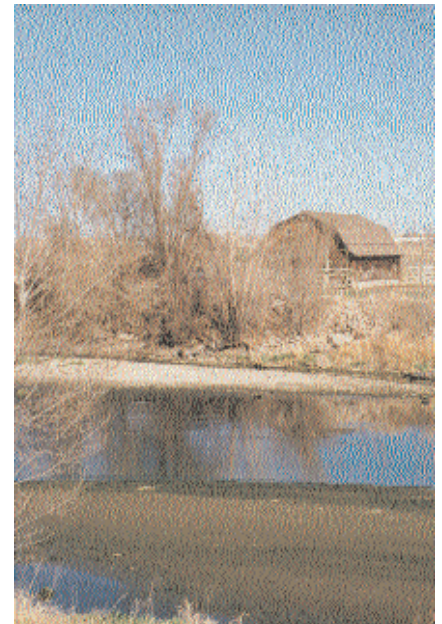
- protects and enhances natural areas,
- provides new recreational opportunities to the public,
- forges new public-private partnerships to foster enhanced restoration and reclamation of gravel mining areas,

- creates a sense of community stewardship for this critically important Adams County resource,
- establishes an environmental education program that focuses on the river system and the natural and cultural heritage of the corridor, and
- protects key agricultural lands that provide a sense of rural character and history for the county.

### *The Planning Process*

The Heritage Plan reflects the efforts of a broad-based steering committee composed of more volunteers than any previous Adams County planning project. The

county involved the public, steering committee, and project partners (public and private groups providing financial and in-kind support) in developing the plan. Planning was conducted through public workshops following steering committee research and meetings in a three-phase process.



**First**, an inventory and analysis of the resources and conditions of the South Platte corri-

## South Platte River Heritage Corridor Plan

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dor was conducted. Based on this information and the input of numerous individuals, a set of plan objectives was developed.

**Second**, all parties were involved in establishing criteria for setting priorities and ongoing assessment of opportunities and constraints. This phase resulted in a vision statement and concept plan for the corridor.

**Third**, Adams County worked with interested agencies, affected land owners, and commercial interests to develop a strategic "Action Plan." This Action Plan includes short-term steps to be completed before 2000, as well as longer term projects.

Partners and sponsors that will be involved in implementing the Action Plan include the following:

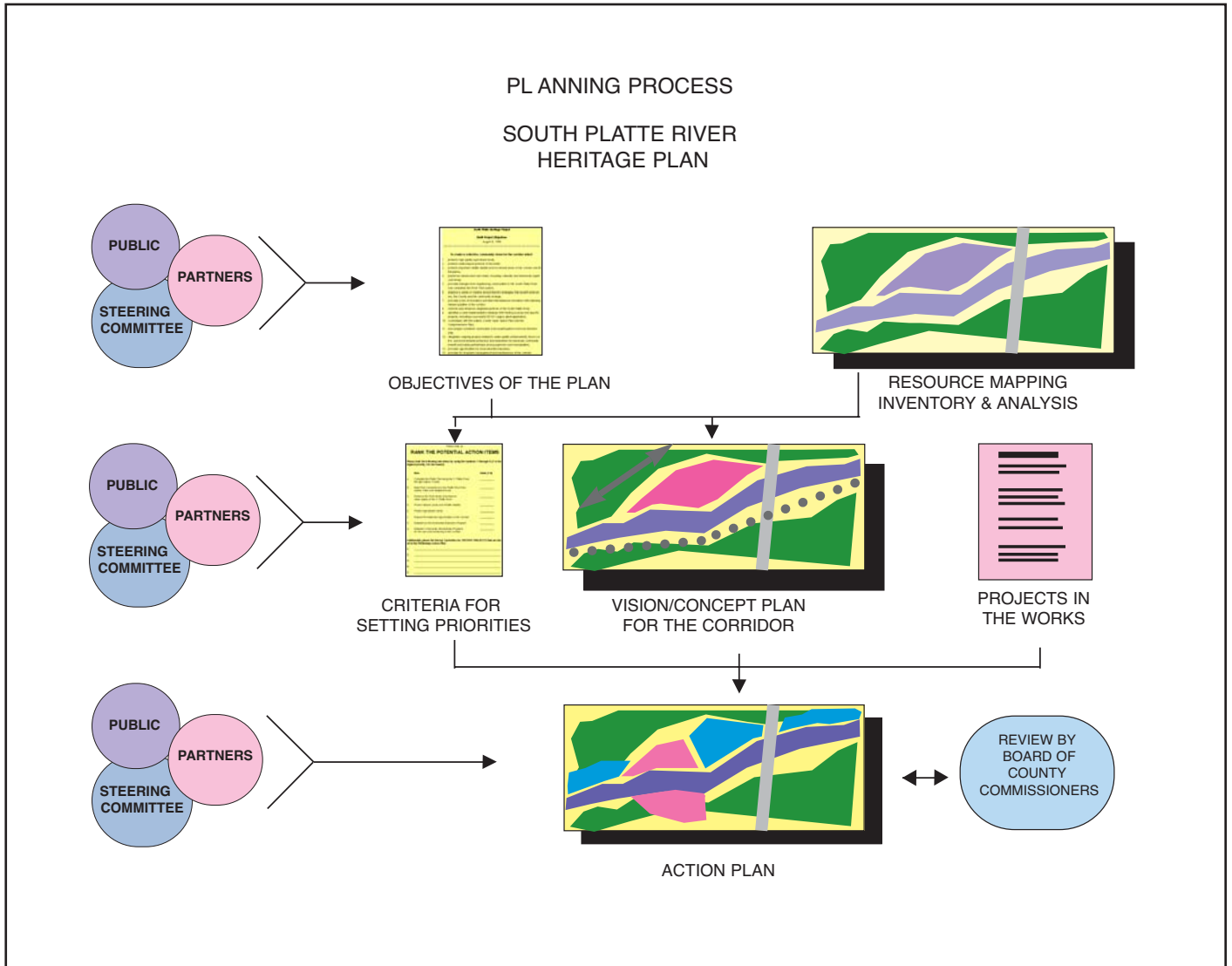
- Great Outdoors Colorado
- City of Brighton
- City of Commerce City

- City of Thornton
- City of Westminster
- Colorado State Parks
- Colorado Bird Observatory
- Metro Wastewater
- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- U.S. Geological Survey
- Urban Drainage and Flood Control District
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Western Mobile, Inc.
- CAMAS/Cooley Gravel Company

A diagram outlining the planning process used for this project is shown on the following page.

Members of the Steering Committee for this project are listed in Appendix A. A contact list for project partners is provided in Appendix B. Appendix C contains sample documents used in public meetings and workshops throughout the planning process.





*This diagram shows the overall planning process used in this project. For each chapter in this report, the diagram is repeated, with the relevant stage in the planning process highlighted by a gray box.*

*Substantial public involvement was critical to the development of the plan and reflects a broad and diverse public that supports this plan.*

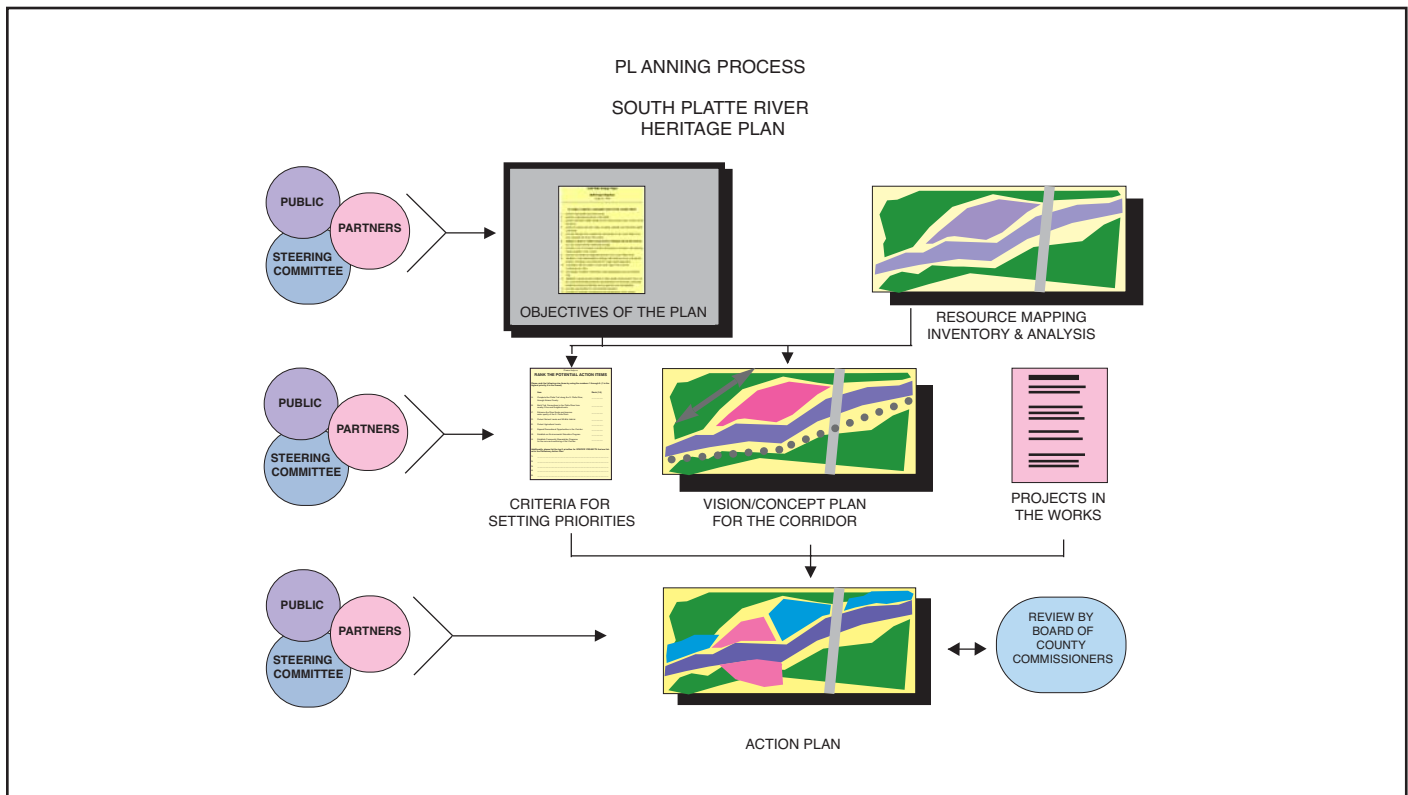
### 3 Objectives of the Plan

The project partners, steering committee, and members of the public came together to establish objectives of the Plan. Objectives focus on six key issues:

- Resource Lands
- Gravel Resources/Water Resources/Restoration Areas
- Trails and Recreation
- Environmental Education and Community Stewardship
- Partnerships/Coordination/Cooperation
- Implementation and Management.

Unifying concepts of the plan include the protection of wildlife habitat areas while accommodating recreation and commercial uses, restoration of degraded areas throughout the corridor, and integrating the Plan with other ongoing efforts to protect Adams County’s resources.

The objectives of the plan are shown on the table on the following pages.



*Plan objectives were developed jointly with the project partners, steering committee, and public.*

**South Platte Heritage Project Objectives**



**To create a collective, community vision for the corridor which:**

**Resource Lands**

*Natural Areas*

- ✓ protects important wildlife habitat and movement areas in the corridor and its tributaries
- ✓ protects important ecological areas

*Agricultural Lands*

- ✓ protects high-quality agricultural lands

*The Bluffs*

- ✓ protects undeveloped portions of the bluffs

*Floodplain*

- ✓ protects, in as natural a state as possible, the floodplain of the South Platte River for flood storage and conveyance

*Viewsheds*

- ✓ preserves natural and rural vistas, including culturally and historically significant areas

**Gravel Resources/ Water Resources/ Restoration Areas**

- ✓ restores and enhances degraded portions of the South Platte River
- ✓ encourages existing and future mining operations to reclaim lands during and after mining that create habitat, restore vegetation, contributes to flood retention and/or provide for recreational opportunities
- ✓ encourages water storage facilities to be multipurpose (water storage, recreation (such as fishing), and habitat restoration)

**Trails and Recreation**

- ✓ provides linkages from neighboring communities to the South Platte River and completes the River Trail system
- ✓ provides a mix of recreation activities that balances recreation with retaining natural qualities of the corridor

**South Platte Heritage Project Objectives (continued)**



**Environmental Education and Community Stewardship**

- ✓ encourages volunteer/ community/ school participation and local stewardship
- ✓ provides opportunities for environmental education

**Partnerships/ Coordination/ Cooperation**

- ✓ identifies a clear implementation strategy with funding sources and specific projects, including a successful GOCO Legacy grant application
- ✓ coordinates with the Adams County Open Space Plan and the Comprehensive Plan
- ✓ integrates ongoing projects related to water quality enhancement, flood control, transportation, infrastructure and environmental protection and restoration for maximum community benefit and builds partnerships among agencies and municipalities

**Implementation and Management**

- ✓ employs a series of creative land protection strategies that benefit landowners, the County and the community at-large
- ✓ provides for long-term management and maintenance of the corridor

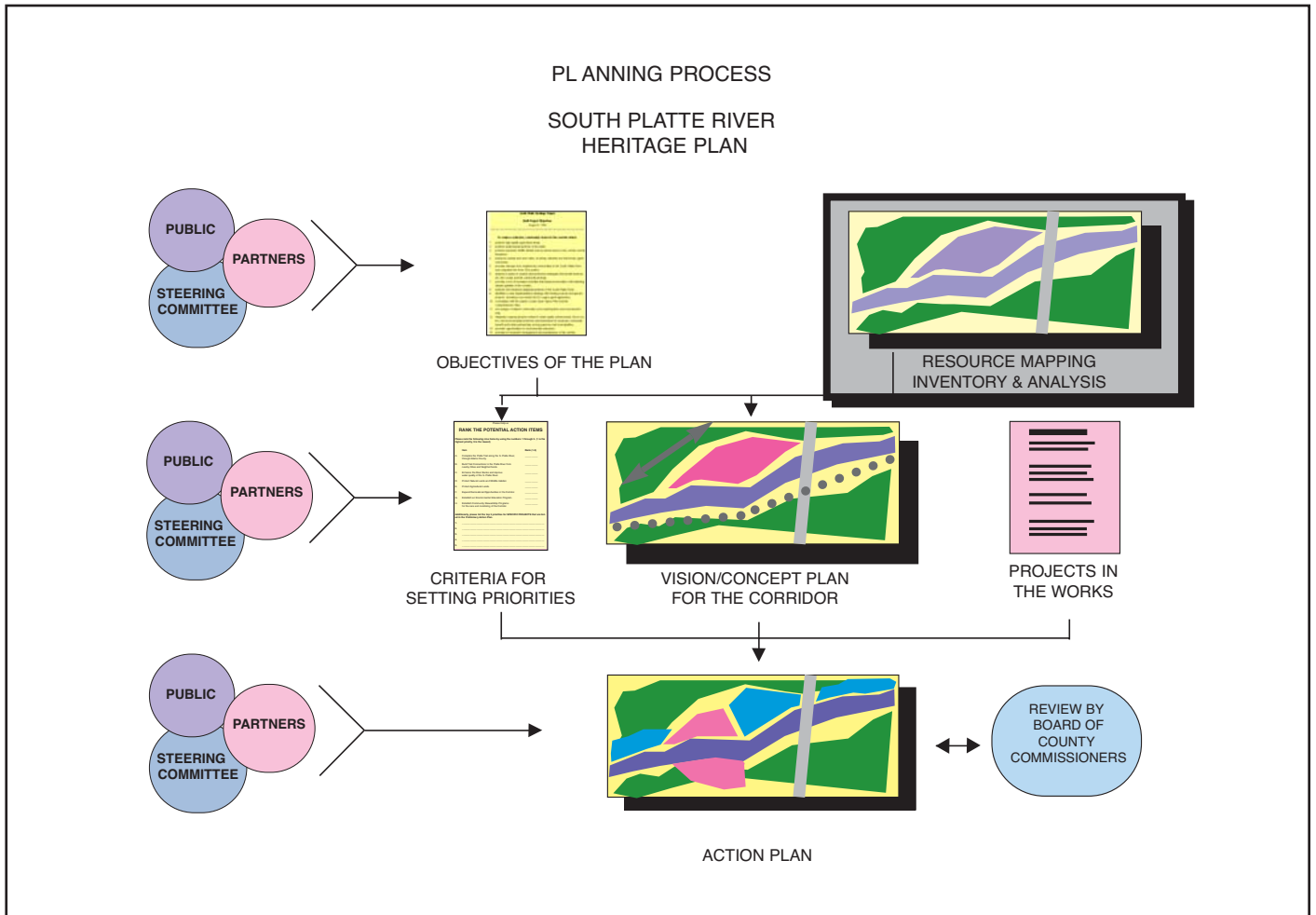




## 4 Resource Inventory and Analysis

Analysis of site conditions, opportunities, and constraints included a detailed mapping phase. Maps include Existing Conditions; Natural Resources; Parks, Trails, and Open Space Linkages; and Future Conditions.

These maps have informed the Steering Committee in its decisions for both the Concept Plan and the Action Plan.



The resource mapping illustrates existing and likely future conditions of the Heritage Corridor, and led directly to the concept development phase.

### *Historical perspective*

As Adams County residents look toward the future of the South Platte River through their County, it is useful to consider what the river has been like historically. This perspective helps us understand what the river is like today, as well as what elements of the historical river corridor might reasonably be regained in the future.

Historically, the amount of water flowing in the South Platte and other Front Range rivers varied widely over the year. The South Platte in those presettlement days was described as “a mile wide and an inch deep.” The channels of such rivers and creeks were not confined to a narrow width, as they generally are today. This meant that flood waters could and often did divert streams in new directions over a broad flood plain defined by widely separated terraces.

This flooding provided many important ecological functions, to which plants and animals became adapted. For instance, it deposited nutrient-rich sediments across the flood plain, thus benefiting plants and animals. It also deposited sand and gravel and created the conditions necessary for regenerating cottonwoods, one of the few trees native to the High Plains.

Because of its pattern of flooding, sandy soils, and arid growing seasons, the South Platte did not have continuous stands of cottonwoods along its banks. Instead, there were isolated clumps of cottonwoods associated with various flood events and site conditions. Cottonwoods also depended on the timing and eventual retreat of floodwaters for their establishment and growth.

As they grew, cottonwoods modified their environments, creating more favorable growing

conditions for other plants and habitat for wildlife. The historical river corridor was a place of abundant wildlife. Eagles and other raptors roosted and hunted in the area. Deer came to the river’s edge to drink and browse. (Even today Colorado’s riparian ecosystems comprise less than 2 percent of the land area, but provide habitat for about 60 percent of the wildlife species.) Some of these wildlife and habitat resources have survived.

The water and rich soils, wildlife, and other resources attracted settlers, some of whom farmed the land. With settlements came roads and schools and bridges to cross the river. Eventually farmers and other settlers started to confine the river with levees to protect their fields and buildings from flooding. Riprap was placed along the river’s banks to reduce bank erosion. This tended to straighten, shorten, and increase the speed of the river. Downcutting of the stream channel resulted from the increased power embodied in the water, power that historically would have been dissipated as the river meandered and spread across the wide flood plain.



The river’s pattern of flooding sorted and deposited sands and gravels along the corridor. These resources have proven very valuable to the development of the metropolitan area. Extraction of these resources has dramatically remade the corridor. In some cases significant wetlands and

aquatic habitats have been formed in reclamation efforts. In other cases, vegetation has been lost and steep banks and a loss of topsoil prevent establishment of new growth.

Human settlements also affected water quantity and quality. Farmers built canals and ditches to carry water to their fields. They built reservoirs to increase the availability of water for irrigation through the growing season and they imported water into the basin. Dams at reservoirs, such as Chatfield and Cherry Creek, regulate the flow of the river for flood control, resulting in flow regimes that are more even over the year than they were historically, and a reduction in sediment. Floods used to come primarily in the spring, with rivers dry at other times of year.

The river also was used to dispose of waste. At some times of the year, 90 percent of the flow in the river can be made up of nutrient-rich effluent, much of which comes from the Metro Wastewater Treatment Facility located at the southern (upstream) County boundary along the South Platte. Nutrients in the water encourage microbial activity which reduces dissolved oxygen, which in turn can make it hard for fish to survive.

All of these actions and varied uses of land along the river have had an effect on the river. Because they are so extensive, it is unfeasible to recreate the corridor of presettlement times. But this is not to say that some very significant elements of nature cannot be attained. There are numerous opportunities to achieve stable natural areas throughout the corridor. The South Platte River Heritage

Plan identifies some of these natural resource opportunities.

The river and its adjacent cottonwood stands provide a very important riparian ecosystem. Areas that support riparian habitats often occur in areas unsuitable for agriculture or other development. This patchwork of woodlands connected by a now-confined South Platte River provides the best remaining wildlife habitat in the corridor. Expanding, improving, and connecting these cottonwood stands will provide the backbone for future habitat enhancement.

### *Significant Natural Areas*

Fifteen sites of potential natural areas significance were identified. These include cottonwood gallery forests, ponds with significant vegetation, a communal eagle roost and wetland, and the bluffs to the west of the river. The full list follows. These areas are shown on the Significant Resource Areas map key on the following page.

- Cottonwood Gallery Forest and Sharp property near East 160th Avenue — Well developed mature cottonwood woodland.
- Bloom Property — Well developed mature cottonwood woodland.



- Eppinger Cottonwood Gallery Forest — Well developed mature cottonwood woodland.
- Cottonwood Gallery Forest — Well developed mature cotton-

wood woodland.

- Willow Bay — Aquatic habitat with marsh habitats along the east shore. Important seasonal habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds.

- Gravel ponds — Aquatic habitats with good enhancement potential. Important habitat for waterfowl.

- Barr Lake buffer zone — Barr Lake and its associated habitats provide regionally significant wildlife habitat. A buffer area between the South Platte corridor and Bluff Lake could facilitate wildlife movement and use of these areas.

- County Regional Park — Provides a variety of protected wildlife habitats including aquatic, riparian, and woodlands.

- Two prairie dog colonies — Concentrated raptor use historically has occurred along the South Platte corridor due to the close proximity of roosts, cover, and prey such as prairie dogs. Preservation of prairie dog colonies is important for providing prey for raptors and foxes.

- Bluffs — Due to the steepness of the bluffs, these lands were not plowed and support the vestiges of native grasslands that once dominated the area.

- McIntosh Dairy — Important wildlife habitat occurs in the mosaic of agricultural fields and cottonwood woodlands. Native grasslands occur on lands owned by the dairy west of Riverdale Road.

- Communal eagle roost and wetland — This important habitat is protected by a conservation easement donated by Western Mobile, Inc. It is the first easement held by Adams County. Other unprotected cottonwood stands also are used by

eagles and other raptors.

- 96th to 104th — The longest and best developed riparian woodlands in the southern portion of the corridor, although the woodlands are often narrow and restricted to the immediate banks.

- Sand Creek confluence with South Platte — This is an important connection not only for public use but also for wildlife movement to and from the southwest.

These areas were identified through a combination of aerial photograph interpretation and site review from public roads. On-site inventory will be necessary to detail the resources of each site.

It will be most effective to use the perspective of the Heritage Plan, an approach that looks beyond isolated pieces of nature to the larger natural systems. For example, protecting an eagle roost solely, without the nearby food supply that attracts eagles, means that eventually the roost may not be used by eagles. It is also important to take extra steps to ensure survival and regeneration of cottonwoods and other vegetation that provide important wildlife habitat in the absence of the ecological processes that historically perpetuated the vegetation.



## *Mapping*

Adams County completed mapping of the South Platte River Corridor study area. Five maps were generated:

- Natural Resources
- Existing Conditions
- Linkages, Parks, Trails, and Open Space
- Future Conditions
- Concept Diagram

These maps were developed from multiple data sets provided by the project partners.

Because so many partners were involved in the project, Adams County began the mapping task by conducting a survey of available hard copy and digital data. Based on the survey results, data that would be most useful in the mapping and development of a final concept were identified.

These data were requested from the partners. From this information, two base maps were constructed: one with roads, water features, and the study area, and a second that showed the results of field work and other information on valuable resource areas. These maps were presented to the partners and stakeholders for comments. Based on comments from these groups, Adams County developed the final set of maps. On each map is a list of the sources of data incorporated into that map.

The Natural Resources map includes:

- valuable resource areas identified in the field,
- agricultural and mining use,
- cottonwood stands,
- wildlife areas,
- bluffs,
- riparian areas and surface water,

- County lands, and
- flood plains.

The Existing Conditions map shows:

- parks,
- trails,
- surface water, and
- County lands.

These data were largely drawn from county and municipal sources and, after being combined, reviewed by representatives from these same jurisdictions. The location of flooded gravel pits and other surface water was identified using 1996 color infra-red photography (1:12000).

The Linkages, Parks, Trails, and Open Space map includes:

- existing and proposed parks and trails,
- surface water, and
- proposed conservation areas.

To get an overall understanding of both the existing and proposed parks, open space, and trails systems in the larger area around the river corridor, this map was created with input from each surrounding jurisdiction. Some of this information was provided to the planning team in a digital or hardcopy form, other was drawn directly on the base map by representatives of area jurisdictions.



Some information is from the Adams County GIS.

The Future Conditions map shows:

- existing agricultural and mining use,
- future water storage,
- mining,
- conservation areas,
- planned developments,
- County lands,
- surface water, and
- accessible mineral deposits.

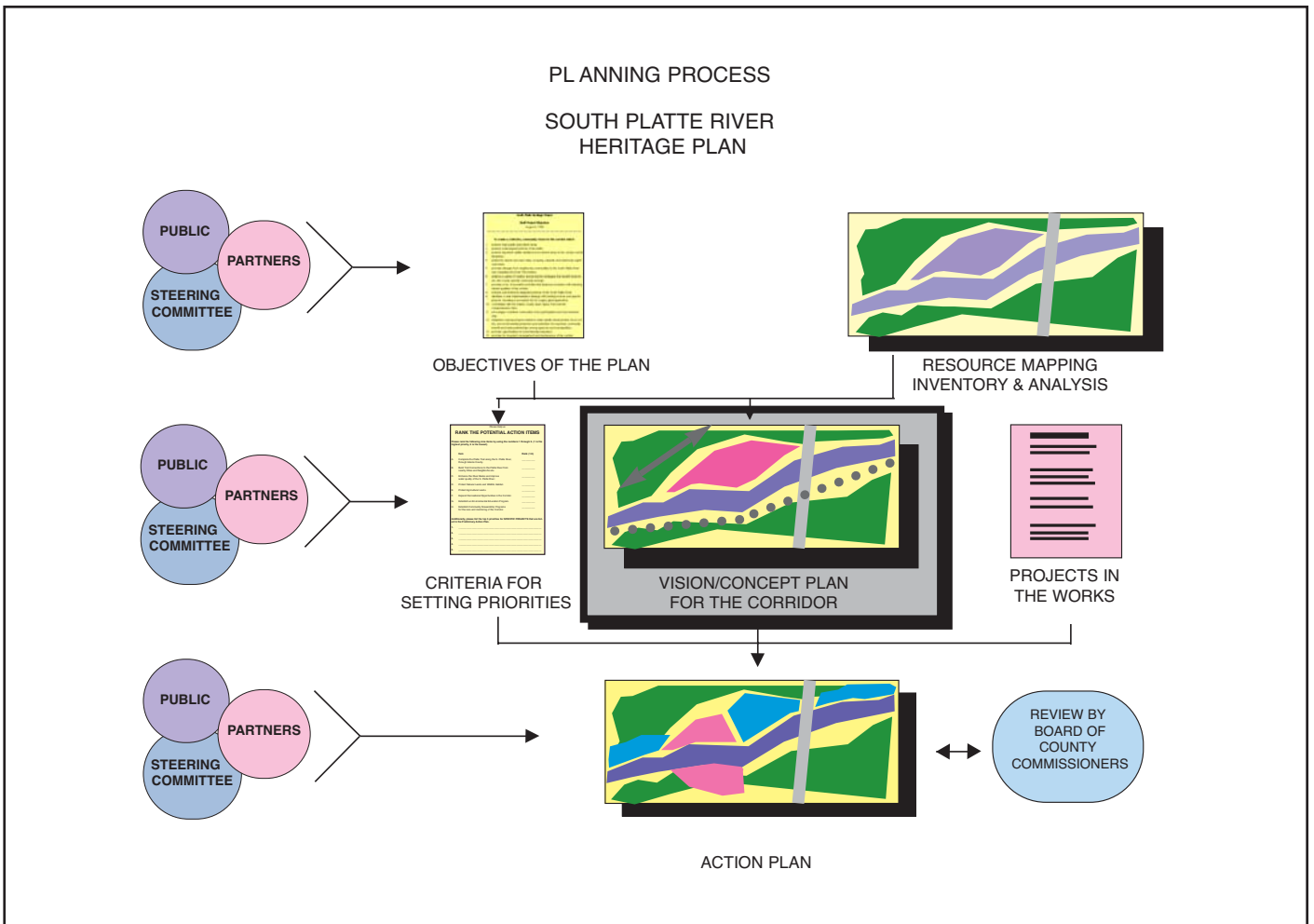
The future conditions map combines plans for the river corridor from a wide range of sources in an attempt to identify how the various jurisdictions view the corridor. Also included are important current features, such as agricultural lands.

The map shows agricultural lands and currently and historically mined areas (identified from 1995 aerial photos), surface water (from 1996 color infra-red aerial photos), future water storage (from the City of Thornton), future mining (from Camas), future conservation areas and future planned unit developments (from Adams County), urban growth areas (from the municipalities), and the broad zone of F1 (floodplain) sand and gravel deposits (from a map of the 100-year floodplain).

# 5 Concept Plan

The South Platte River Heritage Plan includes several key concepts, shown on the attached diagram. From the four maps discussed in Chapter 4, this Concept Plan was developed. These concepts emerged from the plan objectives, public workshops, and from the inventory and analysis of the South Platte Heritage corridor.

The Concept Plan is the road map or vision that can be used to direct current and future efforts in the corridor. It provides a framework for the specific action items included in this plan.



The Concept Plan charts the VISION for the corridor.

Principles of the Concept Plan include:

- **Gateways** located at major road crossings, where enhanced reclamation and trail access announce the corridor as a visual, natural and educational amenity.
- **Buffer along River** protecting natural resources and the floodplain.
- **Platte River Trail** extending the recreational trail the length of Adams County.
- **“Focus Area”** in the central zone of the corridor, which incorporates all components of the vision, including enhanced reclamation, multiple use water storage, environmental education, recreation, natural areas protection, rural character protection and cultural history.
- **Trail Connections** connecting cities, neighborhoods, and key resources (like Barr Lake and Sand Creek) to the Platte River Trail.
- **Rural Character** protection by preserving key agricultural lands and views from Riverdale Road.
- **Expansion of the Regional Park** from 124th south to 120th with a new “gateway” off of 120th.
- **Multiple Use Water Storage** that includes habitat restoration, enhanced reclamation, recreation, and scenic enhancement in

future water storage facilities.

- **Expansion of the existing Conservation Area** across from McIntosh Dairy, where an eagle roost easement currently exists, to include the remainder of the cottonwood grove and the adjacent prairie dog town.
- **New County Open Space** that provides enhanced reclamation and new open space lands at 88th.
- **Linkages to Denver’s South Platte System** including physical connections, water quality enhancement, and environmental education.



## 6 Rating Criteria

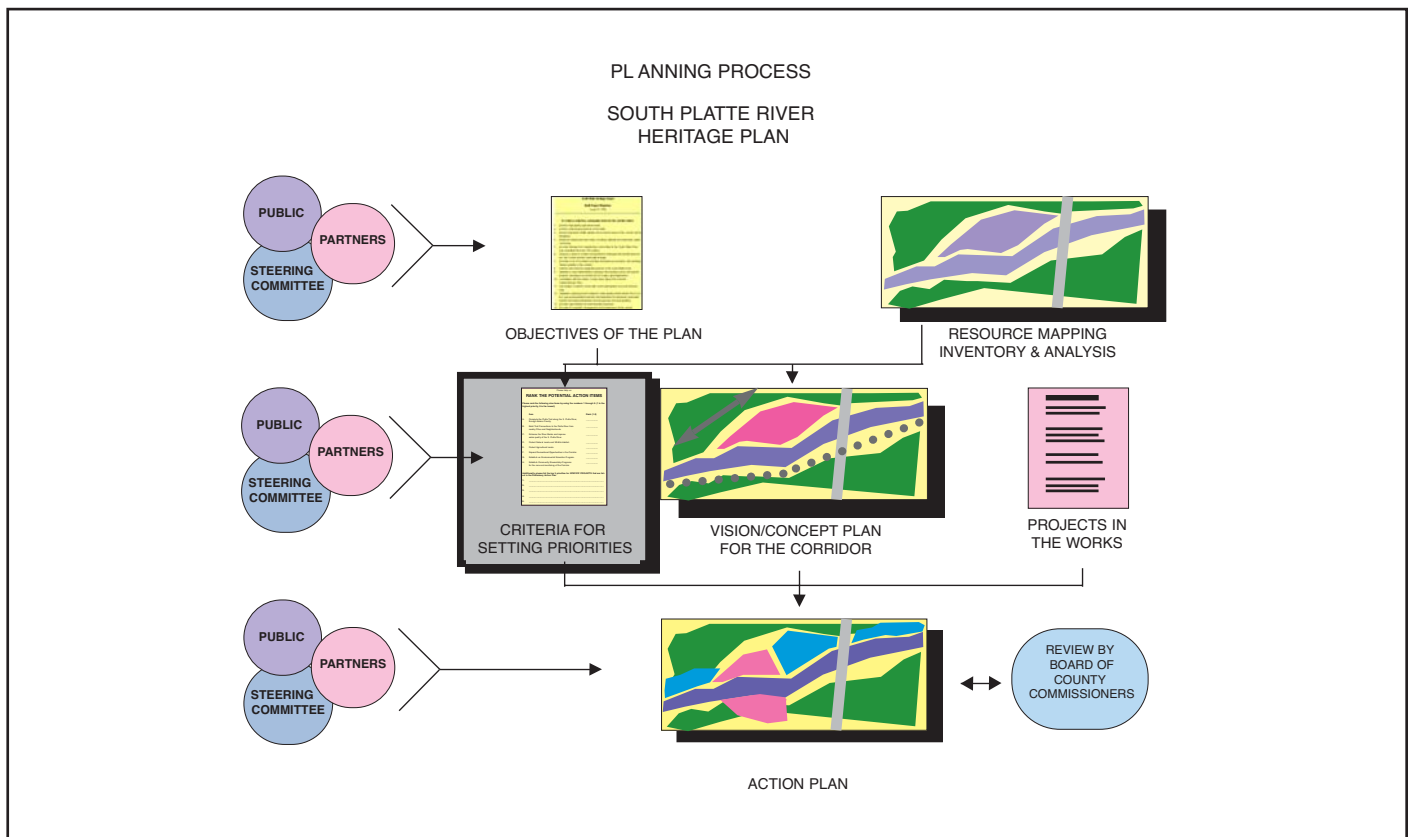
Based on input from the community, a comprehensive process for evaluating lands and projects was developed. This Rating Criteria is designed to determine the relative significance of lands or projects so that the County can focus its energies on those activities that the community has determined to be most important.

For each type of land resource, the following issues were assessed using a Rating Criteria Checklist, shown on the following pages:


- ✓ Does the land meet a conservation or open lands objective?


- ✓ How soon is development or conversion to other uses likely to occur?
- ✓ Are there program opportunities?
- ✓ Is the land available for protection?


Using the checklist, a wide variety of issues were considered that might affect the significance of natural areas, agricultural resources, floodplains, bluffs, visual resources, gravel resource lands, and public use and recreation lands. From this process, key areas for Action Plan implementation were identified.





*These criteria will be useful to the county and its partners over time to evaluate both short- and long-term opportunities.*


<b>South Platte River Heritage Project Rating Criteria Checklist</b>	
	
<b>✓ Does the land meet a conservation or open lands objective?</b>	
<b>Important Resource Lands to Protect</b>	
<i>Natural Areas</i>	
<b>1. Contiguity</b>	
Adjacent to existing open lands, natural areas, or other protected areas	High
Adjacent to planned open lands, natural areas, or other protected areas	Medium
Not adjacent to open lands, parks, natural areas, or other protected areas	Low
<b>2. Functional Viability/Buffering</b>	
Potential for property to be protected from adjacent development	High
<b>3. Natural Area Types</b>	
Contains high quality riparian, wetland or other natural resource qualities	High
<b>4. Wildlife Habitat (terrestrial and aquatic)</b>	
Has high quality habitat or habitat potential	High
Maintains adequate habitat/ home range	High
<b>5. Wildlife Corridors</b>	
Contains an identified wildlife movement	High
Maintains connectivity	High


<b>South Platte River Heritage Project Rating Criteria Checklist (continued)</b>		
		
<i>Agricultural Resources</i>		
1.	Types of Land	
	Irrigated bottom lands with water rights	High
	Irrigated bottom lands	Medium
	Non-irrigated pasture	Low
2.	Viability	
	Full-time commercial operation	High
	Part-time commercial operation	Medium
	Hobby Farm	Low
3.	Compatibility of Adjacent Land Use	
	Neighboring properties in agriculture	High
	Adjacent properties undeveloped	Medium
	Adjacent properties developed	Low
<i>The Bluffs</i>		
1.	Hillside/ Bluff Protection	
	Protects highly visible, undeveloped ridgelines or hillsides	High
	Protects areas with remnants of native plants	High
	Protects moderately visible ridgelines or hillsides	Medium
<i>Floodplain Protection</i>		
1.	Floodplain and Floodway Protection	
	Floodplain is maintained in a natural state	High
	Floodplain improvements enhance flood retention and include habitat enhancement	High

<b>South Platte River Heritage Project Rating Criteria Checklist (continued)</b>		
		
<i>Visual Resources</i>		
1.	Scenic View Quality	
	Has high quality foreground, middle ground and background views	High
	Has views mostly free of intrusive development, powerlines, or other features which adversely impact scenic quality	Medium
2.	Natural and Rural Vistas	
	Preserves natural and rural vistas	High
	Protects views from Riverdale Road	High
	Protects views of cultural and historic sites	High
<i>Water Quality Enhancement</i>		
1.	Water Quality in the River	
	Improves water quality in the river	High
	Enhances aquatic habitat	High
	Improves boatability of the river	High
2.	Tributaries	
	Improves water quality in tributaries	High
<b>Gravel Resource Lands</b>		
1.	Restoration/Reclamation and End Use Planning	
	Restores and enhances affected areas above and beyond state requirements (is a model for reclamation)	High
	Creates wetlands and/or habitat	High
	Creates recreation opportunities	High
	Contributes to flood retention	Medium

<b>South Platte River Heritage Project Rating Criteria Checklist (continued)</b>	
	
2.	<p>Restoration Potential</p> <p>Has water rights for restoration <span style="float: right;">High</span></p> <p>Opportunity to create significant natural or recreational amenity <span style="float: right;">High</span></p> <p>Opportunity to improve existing site <span style="float: right;">Medium</span></p> <p>Little opportunity for site improvements <span style="float: right;">Low</span></p>
3.	<p>Water Storage</p> <p>Has multiple uses as a water storage facility (habitat, fishing, etc.) <span style="float: right;">High</span></p>
<p><b>Public Use/ Recreation</b></p>	
1.	<p>Proximity to other Recreation Lands</p> <p>Adjacent to existing parks, trails <span style="float: right;">High</span></p> <p>Adjacent to planned parks, trails <span style="float: right;">Medium</span></p> <p>Not adjacent to any parks, trails <span style="float: right;">Low</span></p>
2.	<p>Trail Connections</p> <p>Provides trail connection in the corridor (is part of the River Trail system) <span style="float: right;">High</span></p> <p>Provides trail connection between cities <span style="float: right;">Medium</span></p> <p>Links neighborhoods and the River Trail and uses existing community plans for alignment <span style="float: right;">Medium</span></p> <p>Is part of a planned trail system (connects existing and/or future trails) <span style="float: right;">Medium</span></p>
3.	<p>Trail Placement</p> <p>Trail avoids sensitive natural areas and habitat <span style="float: right;">High</span></p> <p>Trail offers a varied experience for users <span style="float: right;">High</span></p>

<b>South Platte River Heritage Project Rating Criteria Checklist (continued)</b>		
		
4.	Water Sports Opportunity for public access to ponds or lakes	High
5.	Fishing Opportunity for high quality fishing experience Restores/ creates aquatic habitat	High
6.	River Access Points Opportunity for public access points to the river	High
7.	Hunting Opportunity for high quality, safe hunting experience	High
<b>✓ How soon is development or conversion to other uses likely to occur ?</b>		
<b>Urgency</b>		
	Property is within urban growth boundaries, or city limits	High
	Property is near existing services (utilities, roads)	High
	Development application or conversion to more intense use is pending	High
	Adjacent lands are developing (residential, commercial industrial)	High
	Property is within a planned service area	Medium
	Property is likely to be annexed	Medium

<b>South Platte River Heritage Project Rating Criteria Checklist (continued)</b>	
	
<b>✓ Are there program opportunities?</b>	
<b>Community stewardship and volunteerism</b>	
Has opportunities for meaningful involvement by the local community	High
<b>Youth at risk/ job training</b>	
Has opportunity to involve youth and can provide some job training/ career benefits	High
<b>Environmental education</b>	
Has opportunity for environmental education	High
Can link programs along the river to school programs	High
<b>✓ Is the land available for protection?</b>	
<b>Landowner Motivation</b>	
Landowner is motivated to protect or sell the land at less than fair market value	High
Landowner is willing to contribute or cost-share restoration or reclamation	High
Landowner requires full fair market value	Low
<b>Level of Protection</b>	
Land is protected in perpetuity	High
Land is protected for specific time period	Medium

<b>South Platte River Heritage Project Rating Criteria Checklist (continued)</b>	
	
<b>Leveraging of Funds</b>	
Significant percentage paid for by other entities (GOCO, private landowner, non-profit organization)	High
<b>Partnerships</b>	
Opportunity to work with partners in protecting and managing the land (Urban Drainage, Metro Wastewater, Cities, County, neighborhoods, etc.)	High
<b>Effectiveness of Transactions</b>	
Transaction leads to protection of large acreage	High
Transaction has the potential to motivate adjacent landowners	High
Transaction is complicated (multiple owners, small acreage)	Low
<b>Management</b>	
Property will be monitored and managed over the long term by a private entity	High
Monitoring and management of the property will be shared between the county and a private entity	Medium
County will be responsible for maintenance and monitoring	Low
<b>Liability</b>	
No significant liability implications with acquisition or protection	High



## 7 Strategic Action Plan

The Action Plan identifies eight key elements as the main thrust of activity in the South Platte River Corridor for the next ten years. Taken together, these key elements comprise a landscape protection and recreation system designed to guide public and private collaborative efforts. Progress in meeting this agenda will begin to demonstrate a heightened public capacity to provide leadership in creating a new vision for the future of the South Platte River Heritage Corridor.

Since many of the key lands and resources

### Strategic Action Plan

1. Complete the Platte River Trail System
2. Demonstration: Multi-Purpose Restoration
3. Change the Public Image: Gateway Enhancements and Stream Corridor Improvements
4. Natural Lands and Wildlife Habitat Protection
5. Protect Rural Character
6. Expand Recreational Opportunities
7. Environmental Education/Interpretation
8. Community Stewardship: Engage People in Caring for the River

identified in this plan are under intense pressure for conversion to other uses, timing is critical. The following sections describe each of the action elements, potential partners and representative projects which could be undertaken to address these elements. The emphasis of the implementation strategy should be to pursue the highest rated lands and projects in each category as funds become available.

### 1. Complete the Vision: Platte River Trail System

#### Summary: Strategic Component #1

#### Objectives and Project Benefits:

- An expanded trail system will serve multiple objectives: wildlife viewing, fishing access, sports like bicycling, riding, running and rollerblading, nature study, and environmental education. By balancing multiple objectives, a more appropriately located trail which respects natural, agricultural and development-related conditions will be created which provides users with a more diverse experience.

#### Key Actions:

- Expand trail north from McKay Road
- Locate trail outside of wildlife and other resource areas

The South Platte River Corridor is both the natural and recreational spine serving the north metro area. The primary way in which people will access and experience the corridor will be through the recreational trail. This corridor is in the heart of the rapidly growing north metro area and in close proximity to Denver, Commerce City, Thornton, and Brighton. The trail currently ends at McKay Road and there is a nine mile stretch which is largely ready for construction. The Platte River Trail System includes the main river trail and numerous access points, trailheads, trail con-

nections, and linkages to nearby neighborhoods and communities.

Siting the trail offers many challenges since the corridor contains a diversity of sometimes conflicting uses, including prime wildlife habitat, active farms, hunting and fishing, and gravel mining operations. The multiple objectives established for the corridor indicate that in order to respect the wildlife, mining and agricultural values in key locations, the trail will need to leave the river and follow alternative routes in some areas. As will be discussed in the next section, the restoration demonstration project for a key area of the corridor will change the location of the trail from the riparian corridor to an alternative alignment near the Fulton Ditch. As a result, one of the key remaining habitat areas and sites for future gravel mining will not be affected by public access. This process of balancing multiple objectives will produce a more sensitively located trail which respects



natural, agricultural and development related conditions and provides users with a more diverse experience.

Key projects in this category consist of the following items:

- completion of the planning for the location of the trail, particularly in the most sensitive locations,
- acquisition of rights-of-way where not controlled by the County,
- completion of the South Platte River Trail sections including that portion in the regional park trail (124th to 136th), that

portion in the regional park addition (120th to 124th), 96th to 120th, and the river crossing near 136th.

- identifying sections of the trail where a parallel horse trail can be located to accommodate equestrian use and minimize conflict with other users,
- complete the Niver Creek trail and improvements and other linking trails as funds become available, and
- design and complete a perimeter trail around Willow Bay once the site is acquired.

## 2. *Demonstrating a New Direction: Multi-Purpose Restoration*

### Summary: Strategic Component #2

#### Objectives and Project Benefits:

- This demonstration land restoration and enhancement project will take a key subarea in the center of the corridor and demonstrate a cooperative restoration of gravel-mined lands for multiple benefit.
- Benefits will include wildlife habitat, recreation, compatible water storage, improved water quality, new wetlands, improved stream bank conditions, and enhancement of residual property values.
- Project will involve significant leveraging of public and private funds, resources and capabilities.

#### Key Actions:

- Through a facilitated negotiation and planning process, Adams County will bring together public and private interests to design and create this restored landscape.

Virtually the entire length of the South Platte River Corridor has been degraded to some extent and will benefit from restoration activities. In order to demonstrate the potential for restoration activities and to engage a variety of project partners, a demonstration project on a critical portion of the corridor is proposed. The land restoration and enhancement demonstration project is one of the most exciting elements of the South Platte River Heritage Plan. The purpose of this project will be to take a key subarea within the Focus Area and demonstrate the benefits of a cooperative restoration of gravel mined lands for multiple purposes.

The project should bring together public and private interests which historically have been in conflict, to develop a model restoration program which meets a set of multiple purposes. A collaborative land restoration program should be developed which achieves a higher level of recreational and wildlife benefit than is currently possible. During the development of this plan, an initial concept was developed and should be refined through a facilitated negotiation and planning exercise which involves the landowners, mining companies, water storage entities, Adams County, recreationists and wildlife interests. All interests have the potential to benefit from this collaborative approach. The purpose of the project will be to demonstrate reclamation opportunities and point the corridor towards an enhanced future.

The South Platte River contains rich sand and gravel deposits which have been and will continue to be extracted in the future. The depth of

these deposits is attested to by the numerous ponds which have been created through mining. Many of these gravel lakes are now being eyed by water providers and local jurisdictions as water storage basins. Unfortunately, many of these reservoirs become walled-off industrial areas with steep and dangerous slopes which offer little



wildlife or recreational benefit. The City of Thornton, for example, has plans to use as many as 13 of these current and future gravel ponds for water storage. The demonstration project should explore whether a collaborative process with a wide variety of public and private interests at the table can pro-actively create an ecosystem that incorporates water storage, wildlife habitat, recreation and landscape restoration objectives.

As identified in the South Platte River Heritage Plan's resource inventory, the corridor contains a number of high quality riparian and wildlife habitat areas which should be protected or enhanced as the mining and storage activities occur. It is critical, if the South Platte River corridor is to continue to play a role as the regional wildlife corridor and important component to the

Bald Eagle system (which consists of the Arsenal, Barr Lake and South Platte), that new habitat areas and cottonwood groves be created as mined areas are reclaimed. While river restoration schemes for mountain streams are relatively common, restoration of warm water, plains/prairie systems is much less advanced, particularly for a river whose flows vary as much as the Platte's. One of



the objectives of this project should be to demonstrate the potential for restoration efforts for other

similar river systems along the Front Range which are or will be experiencing similar pressures.

As a result of discussions with many of the public and private parties active in the corridor, a set of multiple objectives for a demonstration project have been identified and include the following:

- Develop a coordinated approach to the restoration of sand and gravel areas which incorporates wildlife, recreation, water quality, visual and other potential public benefits.
- Demonstrate the benefits of a balanced, multi-objective restoration approach.
- Create a habitat restoration program which provides new areas of wildlife habitat, protects key habitat areas and ensures the continued integrity of the South Platte River corridor as a wildlife movement and habitat system.
- Define a recreational use system. The trails

system should avoid key habitat and mining areas and be located near the Fulton Ditch which provides a quality recreational experience and access to surrounding neighborhoods.

- Develop water storage capacity in a manner which incorporates wildlife and recreational values and utilize available county and municipal water for water augmentation as an incentive for improved reclamation.
- Utilize wetland mitigation banking and available public programs to restore and reclaim sites.
- Enhance the value of residual property for compatible development as a component of the reclamation system.
- Streamline County approvals for activities meeting project objectives.
- Develop ways of improving stream banks, especially concrete rip/rap conditions, through breakup and removal and revegetation with willows and cottonwoods in order to improve habitat conditions.

During the development of the South Platte Heritage Plan, a number of landowners and interested agencies met to determine the potential for this collaborative demonstration project. These meetings revealed that most parties are highly motivated to explore creative options, that opportunities for mutual benefit clearly exist, and that there were public and private sources of funds to facilitate the process. It was also determined that unless the process moves quickly, several critical properties are likely to be disposed of which may foreclose current opportunities. The following is a list of the parties that have indicated a willingness

and desire to take part in the process:

- Adams County
- Cooley Gravel Company
- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- City of Thornton
- U.S. EPA
- U.S.G.S.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Metro Wastewater
- Urban Drainage and Flood Control District

The preliminary location for the demonstration project is an area that runs from McKay Road to approximately 112th, a distance of 1.3 miles along the river. This is an area which has many natural values and is slated for future mining and water storage projects. All of the above agencies and landowners have indicated a willingness to participate and to contribute a variety of funds and resources to enable the demonstration project to work. In order for this project to move forward, seed money for land acquisition and project facilitation will be necessary. It is estimated that approximately \$500,000 is necessary for the County to coordinate and initiate this process.

Currently there are several key private properties within the demonstration project area which are for sale. One implementation option would be to purchase one or more of these properties, develop a mining and restoration plan which meets the multiple objectives, and use mineral revenues to fund further restoration activities on other properties. Once the demonstration project is initiated, the potential for additional multiple benefit projects can be evaluated. An addition-

al area where such a multiple benefit approach could be undertaken is the area south of the existing regional park which is slated for expansion of the park.

### ***3. Change the Public Image: Gateway Enhancements and Stream Corridor Improvements***

#### **Summary: Strategic Component #3**

##### Objectives and Project Benefits:

- Key to the Plan is the improvement of corridor gateways so that over time people will view the corridor as a natural and recreational area that will continue to improve.

##### Key Actions:

- Gateway enhancements and stream corridor improvements will include clean-up and revegetation of stream banks, management of public access, and interpretative and educational enhancements.
- Water quality and habitat improvements will include five to six aeration drop structures and boat portages.

A key component of the plan is improvement of the corridor gateways, environmental qualities and river corridor conditions. This will require changing many of the industrial and degraded conditions at the gateways and defining desirable future conditions. Each of the identified gateways in the plan will require stream bank improvements, management of public access, trail-head improvements, interpretation and educational

improvements, and other modifications so that as people traverse the corridor there is the perception of traversing a natural and recreational area. Proposals for new roads through the corridor at 120th and E-470 will pose both opportunities and challenges to retain and enhance natural value objectives. Because of the concrete rip rap conditions that exist along the full length of the corridor, a key issue will be demonstrating ways to improve the stream bank conditions to encourage revegetation of stream banks. A key emphasis of the restoration demonstration project should be to improve the gateways in the McKay to 120th stretch of the river. These would include improvements to gateways at 88th, 104th, and 120th as part of the restoration demonstration project.

A major focus of improving the stream corridor should be on improving water quality and aquatic habitat. At various low-flow times of the



year (winter and summer when ditches such as the Burlington are diverting major amounts of water), the flows coming from the Metro Wastewater facility

at the Adams/Denver line account for as much as 90% of total flows. The Metro Wastewater District is the major wastewater facility in the Denver metro area with a service area of cities and communities which includes approximately 1.3 million people.

Metro is committed to improving water quality and aquatic habitat in the South Platte and is embarking on major investments in the river to

accomplish these objectives. Metro has already placed a number of structures in the river which serve multiple purposes. These include improving dissolved oxygen content, enhancing aquatic habitat, providing boat chutes which also permit fish passage, and grade stabilization. A more stable low/normal flow channel will allow the development of improved aquatic life habitat through increased woody vegetation along the banks, improved sinuosity of the stream, and resultant greater variability of habitat. Metro anticipates spending over \$6 million on a variety of water quality, river and aquatic habitat improvements over the next three years. Metro is looking for other public and private partners for a variety of river and aquatic habitat improvements.

#### ***4. Natural Lands and Wildlife Habitat Protection***

##### **Summary: Strategic Component #4**

##### Objectives and Project Benefits:

- Key wildlife habitat linkages and natural areas have been identified and, through this component, will be protected from sale or further development threats.

##### Key Actions:

- Attempts will be made to cost-effectively protect a number of sites using purchase of development rights and conservation easements, with a last resort being bargain purchase of land.

The South Platte River is a key wildlife and

waterfowl movement corridor between the metro area and the eastern plains. It is an important component in the regional wildlife habitat system (as documented by the Colorado DOW and others), particularly because of its role as Bald Eagle habitat. It serves as part of a regional birds of prey system which includes other habitat corridors and islands, most notably nearby Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge and Barr Lake State Park. Continued growth and development in the corridor threatens to further disrupt and fragment the functioning of this habitat system.

The key natural lands and wildlife habitat of the South Platte River Corridor can be protected through cooperative actions with landowners and restoration of degraded sites. The tools to accomplish protection are: acquisition, purchase of development rights, conservation easements, land trades, and bargain purchase. A key objective is to expand the existing conservation easement which Adams County has on cottonwoods south of 124th which is used as an Eagle Roost. This easement was donated to the County by Western

Mobile, Inc., and sets a precedent for such cooperative efforts. Easement expansion would enable additional cottonwoods and a prairie dog town can be protected. These plans and the protection of other key properties will depend upon funds availability and successful negotiations with landowners. A number of these properties are currently for sale and may be converted to other uses.

One of the key sites identified for protection is the 200-acre Willow Bay property. This site was identified by the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) as one of two pilot project sites to assess the feasibility of creating an “urban aquatic resource.” In the CDOW’s concept paper it stated that the Willow Bay site “... has a potential for enhancing environmental education, outdoor recreation, watching wildlife and aquatic habitat preservation goals of the South Platte corridor in the northern Denver Metro area.” Willow Bay offers the potential for both protecting a relatively large body of water (110 acres) with its associated habitat, and providing a quality fishing resource in close proximity to urban areas. The property is



zoned and subdivided for residential development. To date the high cost of servicing the property with utilities has deterred development. The owners desire to dispose of the property and it should be purchased soon if it is to be preserved. CDOW is currently negotiating a conditional option agreement for the site and is seeking additional funds and partners for the purchase.

If funds for the property's acquisition can be raised, CDOW anticipates spending \$300,000 for accommodating public access and creating a new Fishing is Fun program for the site. Adams County would own the property and it would be managed by the County Parks and Community Resources Department. CDOW has drafted a proposed management agreement between Adams County, the City of Brighton, Urban Drainage and Flood Control District and the CDOW to describe the various responsibilities of the parties.

Additional natural areas meriting protection which have been identified in the planning process include: the Sharp property in Brighton, creating a new cottonwood forest and habitat area from 102nd to 112th along the South Platte and Fulton Ditch as part of the restoration demonstration project, the eagle roost area at 136th, and several small wetland and habitat areas like Siegest Lake. These projects should be pursued when funding is available and through cooperative efforts of public and private partners as well as landowners.



## 5. *Protect Rural Character*

### Summary: Strategic Component #5

#### Objectives and Project Benefits:

- Platte Valley residents value the rural character of the area. While a number of key landowners in the area have indicated a desire to continue in farming, creative approaches for meeting the need to obtain equity while continuing agricultural activities must be used.

#### Key Actions:

- The Plan will facilitate the protection of several properties so that a “critical mass” of active agricultural land is retained.
- Key to the agricultural system of the area will be the preservation of the McIntosh Dairy, a 300-acre dairy farm adjacent to the river.

At all of the public meetings, participants were anxious to protect what they referred to as the South Platte River Heritage corridor's special “rural character”. In most cases, this meant protecting remaining agricultural lands along Riverdale Road. A number of the key landowners in this area have been approached about protection and financial objectives. A number of these indicated a desire to continue in farming and dairying, but also stated their need to realize some of their equity if they were to “lock up” their lands in agriculture. Several of these properties are currently on the market and are owned by elderly families that need to obtain equity for retirement purposes. Many landowners expressed interest in the concept of selling development rights in return for perma-



nent restrictions on future development of the land. In this fashion, land would be kept in private ownership and management, landowners would realize their equity, and the public objective of keeping it open in perpetuity would be met. In addition, the County would not have to assume management responsibility and the land would be kept on the tax rolls.

The property that was mentioned the most often as the key property in the agricultural system is the McIntosh Dairy. This is a 300-acre dairy farm consisting of rich cropland adjacent to the river and next to Riverdale Road below 120th. The dairy with its open meadows and corn fields sloping down to the river is a scenic attraction to many in the area and the family has often hosted



school tours of the farm and its associated wildlife. The family desires to stay in agriculture if possible and would be willing

to sell development rights if the price was right and if some of the adjacent lands were also protected. They are concerned that if agriculture disappears from adjacent lands that pressures will become too great to continue and that there will not be sufficient land area to support the dairy in the future. This notion of attempting to protect a “critical mass” of agricultural land was also supported by many of the participants in the public meetings.

The objective of this element is to identify funding sufficient to begin negotiations with 4 - 5 landowners in order to obtain contracts for the

purchase of development rights on 2 - 3 properties. Time is of the essence in these negotiations since several of these lands are on the market and development pressures are already being felt on Riverdale Road. A range of \$2 million to \$3 million will be required to begin and carry out this process. Adams County would like to work with a nonprofit land trust such as the American Farmland Trust in order to accomplish these transactions. These will be complex transactions given development pressures and values, water rights values, and the need to leverage available funds effectively. Landowners are anxious to begin this process as quickly as possible. If sufficient funds are available, the program to protect rural character could be expanded to protect other publicly identified areas including agricultural lands near Brighton and the bluff areas near 138th/140th - west of Riverdale Road

## 6. *Expand Recreational Opportunities*

### Summary: Strategic Component #6

#### Objectives and Project Benefits:

- Given the needs of a growing regional population, recreational opportunities should be expanded in the South Platte river corridor, consistent with other public objectives.

#### Key Actions:

- The primary recreational amenity which is part of this plan is the trail system, described under Component #1. Other recreational opportunities that are addressed include access trails, equestrian trail access, ballfields, hunting and fishing, boating (portages and boat ramps), and expanding the Regional Park.

Given the needs of a growing regional population, recreational opportunities should be expanded in the South Platte River Corridor, consistent with other public objectives. The primary recreational amenity which is part of this project is the trail system. In addition, other recreational opportunities include: access trails, equestrian trail access, ballfields, fishing and hunting, boating (portages and boat ramps), expanding the Regional Park.

Completion of the trail system is discussed in the first section of the Action Plan. The partner jurisdictions are responsible for active recreational improvements. Metro Wastewater will be improving boating conditions as part of the design of the new drop structures. The new structures that have been placed in the river at 88th and other locations



have added an element of challenge to boating, as well as improving the navigability of the river where formerly it had been too shallow. Metro plans to spend in excess of \$6 million for a variety of river improvements including these recreational improvements.

A major focus of the recreational program is the expansion of the Regional Park south of 124th to 120th. This area is currently being mined and reclaimed and when completed will add extensive natural and recreational areas to the regional complex.



## 7. *Learning from the Platte: Environmental Education and Interpretation*

### Summary: Strategic Component #7

#### Objectives and Project Benefits:

- Through Plan activities, the South Platte corridor will be used as a hands-on educational resource for the expanding metro area population.

#### Key Actions:

- Programs should include teacher training, expansion of the SPLATTE! curriculum, collaboration with other environmental education programs, enhancement of watchable wildlife sites, a youth angler education program, fishing programs for at-risk youth, and historical documentation of the corridor.

There are many opportunities to expand environmental education and interpretation and to use the South Platte River corridor as a hands-on educational resource for the expanding metropolitan area population. A particular emphasis of this program should be youth education and training the teachers. The corridor is a laboratory for monitoring and teaching about natural systems, restoration and balancing societal objectives.

The following programs are in varying states of readiness and should be considered as a menu from which a final selection of programs will be made. With annual funding levels of approximately \$100,000 virtually all of these programs

could be implemented or expanded. In addition, these funds could be matched by an equal amount of in-kind or programmatic funds from partnering entities. As will be seen, many of these programs build on one another and are inter-related.

#### **Projects:**

##### a. *Teaching Environmental Teachers*

Experience has shown that while there are good curricula for teaching environmental education, many have been developed only to be underutilized by teachers. The objective of this program is to establish a teacher training program to familiarize and encourage teachers to use the SPLATTE! Program (discussed below) and others which utilize the South Platte River as an outdoor educational resource. It will encourage teachers to use resource sites along the South Platte and give them the tools and motivation to integrate environmental education into their classes. The program will be modeled after the T.E.N. (teaching environmental science naturally) program that was developed by Pueblo School Districts, CDOW, State Parks and the Pueblo Zoo. The program will involve an intensive week-long workshop in the summer held in the informal setting of several outdoor “classroom” sites along the river, which will be led by several resource experts from partner agencies and outside groups. The objective of the site-based educational program is to give teachers activities and new ideas that they can use in classrooms throughout the year. Through user friendly, first-hand field experiences, elementary school teachers at area schools will be exposed to a variety of environmental subjects from archeology to zoology. This program could incorporate existing training programs such as the 4-H Habitat

Judging Program developed by Del Benson of CSU for Adams County. This program trains teachers and youth leaders in such areas as: wildlife foods, aerial photograph reading, habitat evaluation, and developing management plans.

b. *Expand the Use of the South Platte Curriculum*

The SPLATTE! Program (South Platte: Learning and Teaching The Essentials) is an interdisciplinary curriculum supplement to the Rivers of Colorado Water Watch Network and is jointly sponsored by CDOW and the Colorado Water Conservation Board. SPLATTE! was developed to foster a broad understanding of the water challenges facing the South Platte River and the state and to motivate students and communities to understand a variety of water issues and take actions to ensure adequate water supplies for themselves and for future generations. SPLATTE! is currently being utilized by a number of Denver schools and at York Junior High School in Adams County. Through teacher training and demonstration, the SPLATTE! curriculum can be expanded

c. *Collaboration with Other Programs*

The Denver South Platte project and the Sand Creek project both have environmental education components which complement the existing and proposed environmental education programs for the South Platte Heritage project. A key objective of this program is to work with these projects in order to avoid duplication and produce greater environmental education benefit than as three separate efforts. Regular meetings with these groups in order to coordinate efforts will produce a more effective environmental education system that benefits the entire metro area.

d. *Watchable Wildlife Program*

Two potential watchable wildlife sites have been identified along the South Platte River. The first is a waterfowl resting and viewing area located near 88th which is being evaluated by CDOW to see if it has potential as a permanent site. It is located just off the existing bike path. The project will entail several thousand dollars of in-kind CDOW support and volunteer time. If it has potential, interpretive signage and viewing scopes may be developed. The other site is Willow Bay which has been discussed in the Natural Areas section of this plan.

e. *Youth Angler Education Program*

The South Platte River offers many opportunities for establishing youth angler education sites. There are a number of suitable ponds in the area which are better sites from liability and safety perspectives than rivers. CDOW currently operates a youth angler education site at the Clear Creek holding ponds near the Adams County boundary. The program is offered from June through August with kids spending most of the morning learning skills and then assisting with a service project such as a clean-up. Stations are set up to handle program participants and cover a range of topics such as fishing techniques, aquatic ecology, angler ethics, licensing, knot tying, fish identification and anatomy, bait and tackle, and how to catch and release. Possible locations for sites include the ponds at the Adams County Regional Park and at Willow Bay.

f. *Hooked on Fishing - Not on Drugs*

CDOW and the Adams County Sheriff's Office support a program to provide at-risk kids with fishing opportunities. Research has found that when high risk youth are involved in positive

extracurricular activities, their grade point averages increase and they have significantly less negative contact with law enforcement. The Adams County program currently handles about 300 kids at 40 per session. CDOW and the Sheriff's office contribute personnel and equipment. Assistance with transportation and programmatic costs could increase the scope of the program.

g. *Mining and Restoration History and Practice*

The South Platte River corridor has a story to tell in sand and gravel mining history and in landscape restoration. The USGS has a project which will be mapping sand and gravel resources along the Front Range and documenting the evolution of mining through historical photos and aerials. In addition, the demonstration restoration project could be documented in order to tell the story and evaluate improvements over time. This story could eventually become a component of Adams County's cultural history and interpreted at the history museum at the Regional Park.

## 8. *Practice Community Stewardship: Engage People In Caring for the River*

### Summary: Strategic Component #8

#### Objectives and Project Benefits:

- Through community stewardship projects, people will learn more about the importance of the river, work with neighbors, have fun and become advocates for further enhancement.

#### Key Actions:

- This component will involve expansion of the River Watch program, launching of annual volunteer projects, and establishment of "Friends of the South Platte" for education and outreach.

There are many ways that the regional community can be involved in enhancing and caring for the South Platte River. Through these community stewardship projects people will learn more about the importance of the river, work with neighbors, have fun and become advocates for further enhancement. Only through active community involvement will long term and effective stewardship emerge.

The following elements of a Community Stewardship program can be created with modest funding support from partners, volunteers and inkind services. The following stewardship programs will be supported by the stewardship funds:

#### **Projects:**

a. *Expand the River Watch Program*

There are currently three River Watch sites

along this stretch of the South Platte River - 88th, 124th, and at north end of Regional Park. The number of River Watch sites could be doubled in order to obtain more accurate information about what is happening in various stretches of the river. River Watch trains junior and senior high students and volunteers to competently and regularly monitor water quality. As a result, they learn about their communities, the characteristics of the river, and what actions can be taken to improve conditions. There is the potential to bring greater resources to these efforts by coordinating the River Watch Network program with Metro Wastewater's objectives and needs for monitoring water quality. This program gives kids and volunteers practical hands-on experience monitoring river quality and the information obtained can be utilized to evaluate different water quality impacts and improvements.

b. ***Launch Annual Volunteer Clean-Up and Green-Up Projects***

There are a variety of clean-up and green-up projects that Adams County would like to initiate as community involvement projects.

Volunteers for Outdoors Colorado (VOC) is willing to consider these projects and often assists many of these types of efforts. In addition, there are active 4-H and Scout programs in Adams County which could be involved in these community projects. Hunting clubs, bird watching organizations, Trout Unlimited, Americorps, Metro North Chamber, local chapters of national conservation organizations and others are potential partners for involvement in and sponsorship of community projects.

c. ***Create "Friends of the South Platte"***

There is the potential to establish a Friends of the South Platte organization to help coordinate, sponsor and organize community projects. These types of organizations are productive entities involving the business community, recreation groups, volunteers, service organizations and others in assisting with community projects. They also help to keep stewardship ideals alive and operating through specific projects. This effort would be coordinated with Denver's South Platte project to maximize its potential impact.



## 8 Plan Administration and Funding

### *Management Philosophy*

The South Platte River Heritage Corridor Plan encourages the use of a variety of flexible techniques to protect lands that are important to the community. The first objective of Adams County's management approach is to utilize techniques which keep as much land in private ownership as possible and acquire only those lands whose protection can be accomplished only through acquisition. In many instances the protection objectives identified in this plan can be met through other techniques which influence the pattern of development, acquire development rights or a conservation easement, and exchange land or protect land through a variety of voluntary methods. For example, productive agricultural land may be protected through the voluntary donation of a conservation easement, the purchase of the development rights, the clustering of development on a portion of the property or some combination of these.

As a result, the land stays in private ownership and management so that it remains on the tax



rolls, and Adams County stays out of the land management business. The implication of this approach is to maximize land protection using creative strategies while minimizing public ownership and management requirements. For those lands that are acquired, the County needs to provide appropriate management and stewardship to ensure that conservation values are maintained. County management of open lands is discussed in "Long Term Implementation".

### *Implementation of Plan - Start-Up Phase: Years One and Two*

It is critical to the success of this plan that the first two years of implementation produce a number of land protection projects that demonstrate to the community the potential for protecting lands, new approaches to land protection and a track record of flexible and fair interaction with landowners. In order to achieve this momentum, it is recommended that a staff member familiar with the objectives of the program commit full-time effort to oversight and coordination of initial activities called for under this Plan as well as the Adams County Open Lands Plan. This individual would focus on developing agreements among the Plan partners and securing funds for Plan projects.

In upcoming years, it is possible that the County could receive over \$10 million annually from a proposed County Open Space Tax, which could be utilized for these and other land protection projects and to leverage other funds such as GOCO and partner monies. This proposal is dis-

cussed below under “Funding the South Platte River Heritage Corridor Plan.” Should this proposal be approved, it is recommended that 6 to 8 percent of these funds be made available for land management and administration of the program. This will assure that the vast majority of funds will go to land protection, while providing for responsible administration and management as well.

The following activities need to be performed by the County Parks and Community Resources Department staff, other appropriate County staff, and the partners to implement the plan.

***1. Establish Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC)***

The Heritage Corridor Plan was developed with a broad-based Steering Committee. A core portion of this committee membership should continue its work through creation of an OSAC to provide community and citizen input into program implementation and specific land protection actions. The OSAC should include a broad representation of various interests in the community, particularly landowning interests. It should provide staff with input on policy and guidance on specific land protection projects. The principal functions of the OSAC are:

- a. Work with staff using the open lands evaluation criteria to determine which lands should be considered for land protection on an annual basis.

- b. Provide staff with policy guidance and input from the community with regard to specific land protection actions, use of County funds, and applying for GOCO and partner funds.
- c. Recommend to the Adams County Commissioners specific land protection actions and expenditures of funds.

***2. Work With Heritage Plan Partners To Implement the Plan***

The County Parks and Community Resources Department, with guidance and assistance from the OSAC, must work closely with Plan Partners to advance specific strategies. A number of early commitments from partners on key action strategies will be crucial to developing momentum for priority corridor improvements and protections. Additionally, the County will need to secure agreements from partners for the management of corridor resources.

***3. Oversee Negotiations With Landowners***

The OSAC and Parks and Community Resources staff will determine the most appropriate way to negotiate land protection transactions with a particular landowner. The options include: working with a local or national land trust, hiring a local real estate negotiator, hiring a land conservation negotiation specialist, hiring



staff, or utilizing county staff, particularly the Adams County Attorney's office. It is recommended that a staff negotiator not be hired initially so that the capabilities of these various options can be assessed. Like other open space programs, Adams County should develop a procedure for reviewing the specific aspects of projects, such as title report, appraisals, environmental assessment, and potential management liabilities.

#### ***4. Leverage Funds***

A number of land protection projects have the potential to leverage significant partner and GOCO funds for their implementation. The Parks and Community Resources staff will be responsible for working with other potential funders and drafting and forwarding grant requests to potential partners.

#### ***5. Present Recommendations to County Commissioners***

Once a particular land protection project has progressed to the point that it requires County action, the Parks and Community Resources staff shall prepare a memorandum to the Adams County Commissioners with recommended actions.

#### ***6. Work with Westminster Open Space Program***

The Westminster Open Space

Program has demonstrated capabilities in the protection and management of open lands and has indicated an interest in working with Adams County to implement action steps in the Heritage Plan. The County Parks and Community Resources staff should work with Westminster staff on a regular basis on Plan projects of mutual interest in order to capitalize on the experience offered by Westminster's program.

#### ***Long Term Implementation - Years Three To Ten***

Subsequent to the first two years of effort, it is recommended that the County Commissioners and the Parks and Community Resources Department undertake a management review to assess the progress of the program with the OSAC. Based on that review, modifications to the plan may be proposed which enhance its capabilities or modify the existing interim arrangements and responsibilities. As a result, a long term operational strategy will be put in place covering the ten-year time frame of this plan.

#### ***Land Management Strategies***

The open lands that will be protected by Adams County fall into two categories: active recreational lands and passive/natural lands. The majority of active recreational lands are new trail segments, Regional Park expansion, and increased boat access proposed in the plan. The passive/natural lands include high priority natural areas, riparian areas important to land-based and adjacent aquatic habitat, and reclaimed gravel areas identi-



fied as wildlife habitat. Each of these will require a different management strategy.

**1. Active Recreational Lands**

Many of the proposed active recreational lands identified in this plan have been anticipated in previous planning efforts. These new trails and recreational areas should be integrated into the current recreation system which is managed by the Parks and Community Resources Department. The operational budget of the department should be adjusted to reflect these new responsibilities when the new trails and park areas are created.

**2. Passive/Natural Lands**

The Parks and Community Resources Department currently manages a few passive recreation lands in Adams County. The expansion of management

responsibility to include passive/natural lands anticipated in this plan would be a new function for the department. The advantage of expanding the existing land management responsibilities of Parks and Community Resources is that they already have land management capability, staff and machinery. To assume these new responsibilities, however, will require training of management staff in the different objectives for managing and enhancing natural lands. A portion of the open lands budget should be allocated to the Parks and Community Resources Department for this purpose on an annual basis as lands are acquired by Adams County. The management arrangement should be evaluated periodically by the OSAC to ensure that it is working out to their mutual satisfaction. If Adams County acquires a great deal of land over a period of years, then an alternative management approach might be merited for consideration.

Many of the open lands to be protected possess important natural qualities. Some of these lands will remain in private hands and will not be publicly accessible. When in public ownership, these lands should be carefully managed for public access and some of them should be restricted to public access for all or portions of the year in order to retain their special characteristics.

Passive/natural lands require a very different management approach than active recreational lands. At the time that these lands are acquired, a management audit should be performed in order to establish the management objectives and approach for each property. A biologist may be required to inventory the animals and plants found on the site and to recommend appropriate management options to retain or enhance these characteristics.

Management activities would include monitoring and patrol, cleanup, access control, various types of vegetative management, and a variety of potential wildlife enhancement activities. These functions vary from those activities normally performed by a parks department for active recreational lands.

### ***Funding the South Platte River Heritage Corridor Plan***

This section examines existing funding sources such as Adams County lands acquisition monies and the Parks and Community Resources trails budget, as well as assessing potential sources

like a proposed open lands sales tax and the Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund.

It should be remembered that the emphasis of the Heritage Corridor Plan is to protect lands, not necessarily acquire them in fee. Therefore, a variety of creative techniques such as purchase of development rights, conservation easements, and other techniques will tend to limit the amount of funds needed to acquire lands and therefore to minimize county maintenance requirements. Land purchases will be made as a result of negotiations with willing sellers only. No funds would be used to condemn land or acquire land through eminent domain.



As discussed above under “Implementation,” it is important that visible, attainable goals be accomplished early in the process so that momentum is established for the Plan. While it is not possible to accurately estimate overall Plan costs, several factors will be important to assuring adequate funding. The most important factor is identification of a dedicated funding source over this ten-year period; such a source will greatly enhance the county’s ability to leverage additional support from partners. Additional factors include the level of GOCO support and the level of cooperation from landowners.

*Adams County Management of Protected Lands*

Only a small portion of lands protected through this project will actually be acquired by Adams County. The majority will remain in private ownership and management and will be protected through conservation easements or other device. Those that are acquired by the County will be managed by the Adams County Department of Parks and Community Resources. Currently, the Parks Department has two full-time ranger staff and three seasonal staff assigned to the trail maintenance program. The Trail Patrol and Maintenance budget is \$75,000 per year. The trails program consists of daily trail patrol, trash removal, vegetation control, minor construction and maintenance of all associated structures and facilities. Funds for the trails and maintenance budget come from the County General Fund. The County is considering the establishment of a Junior Ranger program utilizing youth from area high schools to supplement summer patrol and maintenance operations. In addition, the Adams County Trails and Open Space Foundation, a citizen directed support group, assists with open space and trails planning, development and management, and coordination of volunteers for clean-up.

*County and Municipal Funds*

A variety of tax-based funding options may be available for specific projects through the county and municipalities within the county. Arvada, Aurora, Bennett, Brighton, Broomfield, Commerce City, Federal Heights, Northglenn, Thornton, and Westminster all lie wholly or in part within Adams County and thus may tap individual funding sources for relevant projects. Each municipality,

however, is faced with numerous competing needs; consequently, a broader funding source to leverage these individual funding sources is crucial.

*County Open Lands Tax Initiative*

An initiative is being proposed to establish a 0.17-0.25% sales tax (a range of 1/6 to 1/4 cent for every dollar in sales) in Adams County to fund open lands projects. If a petition drive is successful, this measure will appear on the November 1997 ballot. Annually, such a tax could raise from \$3.5 million to \$5.2 million. These funds would provide a significant foundation for implementing the Action Plan, as well as other open lands initiatives throughout the county. They would also serve as a crucial leveraging mechanism, potentially allowing the County to access funds from GOCO, the Plan Partners, and other sources.

*Great Outdoors Colorado Funds*

Passed in 1992, Amendment 8 established the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Trust Fund. This amendment earmarks a portion of Colorado lottery revenues to fund programs for parks, wildlife, outdoor recreation, environmental education, open lands, and natural areas. The fund will receive a projected average of \$10-20 million per year through 1998, when it will receive up to \$35 million a year. State lottery reauthorization beyond 1998 is under legislative consideration and appears likely. A 15 member, governor-appointed Board has made more than \$20 million in grants for more than 300 projects across the state.

Most projects chosen for funding have involved partnerships among public agencies, non-profit organizations, volunteers and private sector

## South Platte River Heritage Corridor Plan

groups. Adams County would be eligible to compete for grants from the local government grants, open space grants, and trails grants portions of the program. Communities working to implement an established open lands plan are likely to compete strongly for these funds.

### *Funding Scenarios*

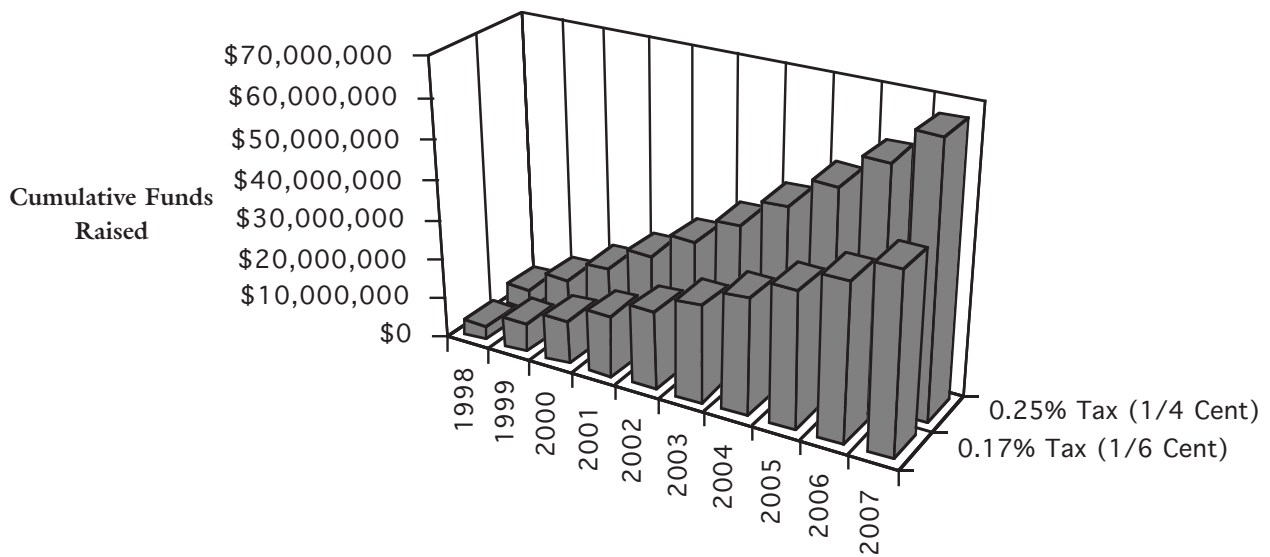
Alternative revenue scenarios can be projected from the funding sources potentially available for implementing the Plan. The table and graph below explore two alternatives for a dedicat-

ed source of funds. Both would utilize the proposed county open lands sales tax. Scenario One assumes approval of a county-wide 0.25% sales tax; Scenario Two assumes a 0.17% sales tax. Under these alternatives, total dedicated funds available could range from \$45 million to \$67 million for the full Plan period. Absent such a tax, other less stable funding sources would be required for all Action Plan components.

FUNDING OPTIONS FOR COUNTY OPEN LANDS: PROPOSED TAX LEVY ALTERNATIVES		
Year	Scenario 1 County-wide 0.25% Sales Tax (1/4 Cent per Dollar)	Scenario 2 County-wide 0.17% Sales Tax (1/6 Cent per Dollar)
1998	\$5,220,549	\$3,480,366
1999	\$5,533,782	\$3,689,188
2000	\$5,865,809	\$3,910,539
2001	\$6,159,099	\$4,106,066
2002	\$6,467,054	\$4,311,370
2003	\$6,790,407	\$4,526,938
2004	\$7,129,927	\$4,753,285
2005	\$7,486,424	\$4,990,949
2006	\$7,860,745	\$5,240,497
2007	\$8,253,782	\$5,502,521
Ten-Year Total	\$66,767,578	\$44,511,719

*Note that, in the event that open lands tax funding became available, many important projects throughout the county -- not just South Platte corridor projects -- would be competing for available tax dollars.*

Cumulative Funds Generated by Alternative Tax Scenarios



## *Completing the Strategic Action Plan*

There are a number of variables that influence estimating the cost of completing the Strategic Action Plan difficult. The most important variables are the following:

1. *GOCO Funding.* A key variable is how many of the Strategic Action Plan projects will attract GOCO funding and at what level. The experience of other communities and counties vary widely with some jurisdictions able to leverage \$1, \$2 or \$3 of GOCO funding for every local dollar spent. This often depends on the type of project and the type of resource being protected.
2. *County Funding.* GOCO requires a level of local match for virtually every project that it funds, usually at least 25%. If the County develops a dedicated funding source it will be in a much better position to access GOCO funds. In addition, the percentage of county funds which are dedicated to the South Platte as opposed to the rest of the County is also a variable.
3. *Cooperation Among Partners.* There are many potential public and private partners in the carrying out of Strategic Action Plan projects. If these partners bring both funds and in-kind resources to these projects they will be much more doable and the potential for leveraging additional resources will be enhanced.
4. *Landowner Cooperation and Success in Use of Creative Techniques.* To the extent that the

County is successful in utilizing creative, less than fee protection techniques and engaging landowners effectively, project costs will be reduced. In part this also depends on the cooperation of landowners and their flexibility in exploring creative options. Success in the use of creative techniques in the first few projects will help set the tone for future projects.

5. *Land Trust Assistance.* Land Trusts such as American Farmland Trust and the Trust for Public Land can assist with land protection transactions and reduce costs to local government. To the extent that they become involved, they could reduce transaction and project costs at considerable savings to the public.

As a result of these variables, it is impossible to estimate how much of the Strategic Action Plan can be completed over the next ten years. However, all of these variables are key elements with the top three being GOCO funding, County funding and level of Partner commitment. Effective and fair use of creative techniques in several initial projects with cooperative landowners will help to establish momentum for the program and lead to additional support.

## Appendix A

### *Steering Committee Membership*

#### **CITIZEN APPOINTMENTS**

Steve Bernard, At Large, Business (Legal)  
Kathy Bloom, Property owner on river  
David J. Campbell, Horsemen's Association  
Curt L. Copping, Gravel Representative  
John Davis, 4-H Youth Representative  
Virginia Eppinger, Property owner on River and Historical  
Skip Fischer, Business (Assessor)  
Robert Fleming, Business (Planning and Business)  
Barry Glasgow, Property owner on River  
Kris Graves, Trails and Open Space Foundation Representative  
Timothy A. Gritton, At large  
Nathan Hatcher, At large  
Edwin Hickel, Education and Youth  
Tom Lauridson, Agricultural  
Shirley Metcalf-Sabin, At large  
Nancy Miller Page, At large  
Richard Pabon, At large, youth  
Bobbette K. Ranney MD, Agricultural  
Gloria Rudden, Neighborhood Representative  
Tammie Scott, East County  
Don Tanabe, Agricultural in River Corridor  
M.L. Tucker, Gravel Representative

#### **ELECTED OFFICIALS**

Commissioner Ted Strickland, Adams County  
Commissioner Martin Flaum, Adams County  
Commissioner Elaine Valente, Adams County  
Former Commissioner Guillermo DeHerrera  
Council Member Don Allard, Arvada  
Council Member Steve Hogan, Aurora  
Council Member Doug Carlsten, Brighton  
Council Member Ralph Johnson, Broomfield  
Council Member Clark Griep, Alternate Broomfield  
Council Member Sherri Szymanski, Commerce City  
Council Member Mike Vallero, Federal Heights  
Council Member Carol Robinson, Alternate Federal Heights  
Council Member Kathleen Novak, Northglenn  
Council Member Bill Gillespie, Alternate Northglenn  
Council Member Chuck Warner, Thornton  
Council Member Bob Johnson, Alternate Thornton  
Council Member Gary Smith, Westminster  
Council Member Fred Allen, Alternate Westminster

#### **TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Adams County Parks	Crystal Gray, Rick Anderson
Adams County Planning	Nicki Stoner
Adams County Engineering	Daren Duncan
Arvada Staff	Mike Lee
Aurora Staff	Linda Strand
Brighton Staff	Dirk Richwine and Mark Hershberg
Broomfield Staff	Paul Derda
Commerce City Staff	Rob Thames and Rick Bassett
Federal Heights Staff	Konad Krori
Northglenn staff	Tim McCaffrey
Thornton Staff	Lynn Lathrop
Westminster Staff	Bob Lienemann
Urban Drainage	Ben Urbanos
Metro Wastewater	John Van Royen
Division of Wildlife	Scott Hoover, Larry Garcia, Ray Spencer
State Parks	Dan Weber
CSU Extension	Tom McBride
US Fish and Wildlife	Gary Patton, Jan McKee
U.S. Geological Survey	William Langer
Colorado Bird Observatory	Mike Carter
Denver Staff for coordination with their Legacy grant	Andrew Wallach



## Appendix B

### List of Project Partners

City of Westminster  
Bob Lienemann, Open Space Coordinator  
4800 West 92nd Avenue  
Westminster, CO 80030  
430-2400/426-5875 FAX

Commerce City  
Rob Thames, Parks Department  
Rick Basset, Parks Department  
5291 East 60th Avenue  
Commerce City, CO 80022  
289-3758/289-3783 FAX

Colorado Bird Observatory  
Mike Carter  
1340 Picadilly Road  
Brighton, CO 80601  
659-3438/ 659-5489 FAX

Colorado Division Of Wildlife  
Ray Spencer, Dist. Wildlife Manager  
Robin Knox, Aquatics  
Larry Garcia  
6060 Broadway  
Denver, CO 80216  
291-7227/291-7383 FAX

Urban Drainage & Flood Control District  
Ben Urbonas, Planning  
2480 West 26th Ave.  
Suite 156 B  
Denver, CO 80211  
455-6277/455-7880 FAX

City of Thornton  
Lynn Lathrop, Parks Department  
Mark Koleberg, Water Resources  
2211 Eppinger Boulevard  
Thornton, CO 80229  
538-7636/538-7586 FAX

City of Brighton  
Dirk Richwine, Community Development  
Mark Heirshberg, Parks Department  
22 South 4th Avenue  
Brighton, CO 80601  
659-4050/659-4844 FAX

Colorado State Parks  
Dan Weber, Barr Lake State Park  
1340 Picadilly Road  
Brighton, CO 80601  
669-1739/659-5489 FAX

Metro Wastewater  
John Van Royen  
6450 York Street  
Denver, CO 80229-3030  
286-3463/286-3035

U.S. Geological Survey  
William Langer, Aggregate Resource Geo.  
MS 913-Box 25046  
Denver, CO 80225-0046  
236-1249/236-0214 FAX

U.S. Fish And Wildlife Service  
Gary Patton  
Jan McKee  
730 Simms Street  
Room 290  
Golden, CO 80401  
275-2370/275-2371 FAX

CAMAS/Cooley Gravel Company  
Curtt Coppage  
P.O. Box 5485  
Denver, CO 80217-5485  
989-0300/989-1655 FAX

## Appendix C

*Sample Documents  
from Public Meetings and Workshops*

**Public Meeting**

August 8, 1996



**Agenda**

- 7:00 p.m. Welcome and Introduction to the Project**
  - Project Scope and Schedule
  - The Condition of the River – Past and Present
  - Project Objectives
  
- 7:15 p.m. Overview of Conservation Techniques**
  
- 8:10 p.m. Resource Mapping – Where we are in the process**
  
- 8:15 p.m. Small Group Discussions**
  - Vision for the Corridor
  - Opportunities for Protection, Enhancement, Recreation
  
- 9:00 p.m. Small Groups Report Back**
  
- 9:20 p.m. Adjourn**

A D A M S C O U N T Y O P E N S P A C E P L A N  
S o u t h P l a t t e H e r i t a g e p r o j e c t



**Group Discussion on Adams County Open Space**

*Public Meeting July 24, 1996*

**1. Review definition of open space:**

Land and/or water which is:

- Dedicated for public use and enjoyment, and/or
- Reserved or dedicated to the conservation of wildlife and natural resources, or
- Private areas used for farming, ranching or other agricultural practices which retains the rural, undeveloped character of an area, or
- Needed for the health and safety (flooding) of the community, or
- Functions as community separators or buffers.

**2. Identify the significant open space resources in Adams County related to:  
Natural and Visual Resources**

- Wildlife (viewing, habitat, corridors for birds, mammals, fish)
- Vegetation (cottonwood/ willow river bottoms, wetlands, grasslands)
- Water Systems (streams, creeks, canals, drainages, water bodies, special areas)
- Landscape Features (geologic outcrops, ridges, steep slopes)
- Prime viewsheds or visually significant areas

**Agricultural/ Historical/ Cultural Resources**

- Prime Agricultural Areas (irrigated farmlands, large dry land farms, potential irrigated agricultural lands)
- Historical Landmarks
- Areas that express the unique cultural values of the County

**Recreation and Trail Resources**

- High quality existing and potential recreation areas (active and passive)
- Major trail corridors and trail linkages into and throughout the County (existing and potential)

**Community Buffers**

- Lands that function as community separators or buffers

## South Platte River Heritage Plan

### Project/ Program Worksheet

Please use this worksheet to document all projects or programs that relate to the South Platte River Corridor through Adams County. Include projects and programs that you know will be happening or that you think should happen. Fill out the form as completely as possible and fax by October 2 to Conservation Partners at 831-9379 (fax), 831-9378 (phone).

☉ **Project Activity/ Name:**

☉ **Location/ Area in the Corridor it affects:**

(attach map if possible)

☉ **Agencies/ Organizations involved (and roles):**

☉ **Who is project manager for the project:**

☉ **Community benefits (i.e. parks, flood control, improved water quality, etc.):**

☉ **Funding Sources (committed funds):** (include source, amount, contact person)

☉ **Potential Funding Sources:**

☉ **Should this project be a candidate for inclusion in the Legacy Grant Proposal? Explain.**

☉ **Other important information.**  
(attach info if necessary)

☉ **Schedule of Project and Anticipated Budget**

Immediately    Within next year    Within 1-5 years    Within 5-10 years    More than 10 Years

1996 Budget \_\_\_\_\_ 1997 Budget \_\_\_\_\_ Maint. Budget and Responsible Party \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please fax to Conservation Partners at 831-9379 as soon as possible, but not later than October 2, 1996. Call Marty Zeller or Carol Adams at 831-9378 with questions.

Please Help us

## RANK THE POTENTIAL ACTION ITEMS

Please rank the following nine items by using the numbers 1 through 9. (1 is the highest priority, 9 is the lowest)

Item	Rank (1-9)
A. Complete the Platte Trail along the S. Platte River, through Adams County.	_____
B. Build Trail Connections to the Platte River from nearby Cities and Neighborhoods.	_____
C. Enhance the River Banks and improve water quality of the S. Platte River.	_____
D. Protect Natural Lands and Wildlife Habitat.	_____
E. Protect Agricultural Lands.	_____
F. Expand Recreational Opportunities in the Corridor.	_____
G. Establish an Environmental Education Program.	_____
H. Establish Community Stewardship Programs for the care and monitoring of the Corridor.	_____

Additionally, please list the top 5 priorities for SPECIFIC PROJECTS that are listed in the Preliminary Action Plan.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

The ranking survey shown on the previous page was analyzed, and the public's ranking of action items is presented below.



## Appendix D

### *MENU OF LAND PROTECTION OPTIONS*

As part of the South Platte planning process, interested citizens attended a workshop on various land protection options. Issues discussed included the following:

- Changing Development Patterns
- Voluntary Techniques to Protect Land
- Community Incentives
- Acquisition of Title or Development Rights
- Regulatory Techniques

This appendix provides an introduction to the array of options available.

These materials were prepared by Conservation Partners, Inc. Conservation Partners supports the sharing of this material as long as full acknowledgement is given to the preparers and supporters of this *Menu of Land Protection Options*.

## **MENU OF LAND PROTECTION OPTIONS**

The following is a list of alternative techniques which might be considered part of a package of options to encourage protection of important natural, scenic and open land resources. In other areas of the U.S. which have effective open land protection programs, a mix of public, private and nonprofit tools are used to creatively address this issue. Experience has shown that where there is a choice of techniques which can be tailored to the specific circumstances of a family or landowner, their economic and conservation objectives, and the nature of development pressures, there is the greatest potential for success. The challenge is to define the appropriate package of tools to successfully protect special resource lands. These techniques vary widely in terms of their cost to the local jurisdiction, voluntary or regulatory nature, effectiveness, and the ability to permanently protect land.

*Figure 1. Rural Location Prior to Development, After Conventional Development and After Creative Development (Figure from Yaro, Arendt, Dodson, and Brabec, Center for Rural Massachusetts, 1988).*

### **Changing Development Patterns**

#### *1. Limited or Protective Development*

A property with high visual, agricultural or natural resource qualities may be developed in ways that protect the conservation values. This “protective” or limited development allows for the sensitive development of a portion of the property in exchange for the protection of the remainder. Usually the undeveloped portion is protected through a conservation easement (see below). The reserved development sites are located so as not to interfere with the agricultural operation, wildlife habitat, scenic or other resource values. The value of these limited development sites is enhanced by the permanent protection of lands adjacent to them. Limited development permits the landowner to protect the conservation values of a property while achieving economic objectives through the creation and sale of a few sensitively located, but very valuable residential lots.



*Figure 2. A 910-acre ranch before development, after conventional 35-acre subdivision, and after limited development.*

## *2. Rural Cluster or Open Space Zone*

Cluster development groups development on one or more portions of a site to permanently preserve other portions of the site. Instead of large lots, the cluster concept encourages small lots off of productive agricultural, scenic, or natural resource lands. Common open space is created which can be used for agricultural or recreational purposes. This concept can be combined with conservation easements to permanently protect the open land that is created by the clustering of development. Generally, a cluster ordinance requires that 60 to 80% of the site remain open and often a density bonus is utilized to encourage landowners to utilize this technique.

## **Voluntary Techniques**

### *3. Conservation Easement*

A conservation easement is a voluntary and permanent restriction limiting development of a property in order to protect conservation values. The easement can either be donated to a land trust or purchased by a governmental entity. The easement is a recorded restriction in the property deed and therefore applies to all subsequent owners. The conservation easement is a flexible instrument that can limit development as much as the landowner desires. A conservation easement is usually granted to a qualified non-profit land trust or government entity that has the responsibility of monitoring and enforcing the terms of the easement. A land trust is either a local organization or part of a national or statewide organization such as the Nature Conservancy. Except for the fact that the development rights have been limited by the terms of the easement, the landowner continues to own, use and manage the property. Since the donation of a conservation is treated as a charitable gift, the landowner is entitled to a charitable deduction on their income tax equal to the difference between the fair market value and the restricted value of the property. Since the easement reduces the value of the property, it can be an important tool in reducing estate tax liability for properties that have appreciated rapidly. With the conservation easement, the landowner retains full control over public access and management of the property.

### *4. Deed Restrictions/Covenants*

If a landowner determines that a conservation easement is not an appropriate technique since the owner would prefer not to deal with government or a nonprofit organization, a deed restriction or mutual covenant may be more acceptable. Mutual covenants are made between adjacent landowners restricting the use or development of the properties. They are different from easements since they are enforced through other landowners, not a government or nonprofit organization. As a result, enforcement is optional and depends on adjacent landowners taking court action. In addition, they are not perpetual and do not provide charitable deduction against income taxes as do easements.

### *5. Technical Assistance Team*

An alternative which has been tried by a number of jurisdictions and land trusts is the establishment of a technical assistance team to work with landowners to perform land planning, explore limited development options, and analyze legal, tax planning and ranching options to assist ranching families in considering a wide range of alternatives for protecting agricultural land.

### *6. Estate Planning*

The combined impact of federal and state inheritance laws may require families that own large properties to sell their land just to pay estate taxes. These taxes can amount to 55% or more of the value of the property and with the recent rapid escalation in land values it may require sophisticated estate planning to minimize estate tax liability. Proper estate planning can reduce or eliminate estate taxes and keep the property in the family.

### *7. Formation of Agricultural Districts*

Agricultural districts are voluntarily formed where farmers and ranchers agree to keep their land in agriculture for a defined period of time, usually five to ten years, in return for additional property tax relief, protection from nuisance complaints, and limitations on the county's ability to extend roads, utilities, and special districts into the defined agricultural district.

## **Acquisition of Title or Development Rights**

### *8. Cash Purchase*

Cash purchase at the fair market value is generally the preferred option for most landowners selling property to public entities. While in many instances obtaining cash payment yields the greatest return to the landowner, capital gains and other taxes may significantly reduce net return and make other types of transactions more attractive.

### *9. Creative Land Purchase for Public Open Space*

For lands which may be desirable for public acquisition and management, there are a variety of techniques for creatively interacting with private landowners which are discussed below. The management of public lands may require extensive public resources and these lands are removed from the tax rolls. Financing for public acquisition often comes from property tax, sales tax, or real estate transfer tax sources.

#### *A. Donation or Gift*

For certain landowners the charitable donation of land to a public entity or a non-profit land trust is attractive for tax, family and estate planning reasons.

#### *B. Bargain Sale*

A bargain sale is a combination gift and sale of a property to a governmental or nonprofit entity. The landowner receives the benefit of both cash income and a charitable gift deduction for the difference between the fair market value and the bargain price.

#### *C. Donation with Reserved Life Estate*

A landowner may wish to donate land to a public entity or land trust, but retain the use of all or a part of it during their lifetime or the lifetime of the immediate family.

#### *D. Charitable Gift Annuity or Charitable Remainder Trust*

A landowner may wish to donate a property to a governmental entity in return for an annuity or fixed payment to fund retirement instead of cash sale. Such an arrangement may have significant tax benefits for landowners who have held property for long periods and can be an effective estate planning tool.

#### *E. Installment Purchase*

An installment purchase is simply a purchase spread over a term of years to benefit both purchaser and seller. An interest rate is built into each installment payment and one of the benefits of selling to a public entity is that the interest may be tax exempt, further increasing the sellers return.

#### *F. Lease-Option*

A lease-option agreement permits the City to lease a property for a period of time with an option to purchase the property during or at the end of the term of the lease. Such an arrangement would permit the City to determine whether it is in the City's interest to acquire the property, assess management costs and provide additional time to assemble sufficient funds to complete the purchase.

#### *G. Rolling Option*

A rolling option is a series of options to buy portions of a property and thus extend the purchase over a period of years. Rolling options are frequently used by public entities that do not have sufficient funds for a fair market purchase, but can expect an annual appropriation for a portion of the sales price. Generally, the least attractive portion of the property is sold first so that there is incentive for the public entity to com-

plete the full purchase once the rolling option period begins.

*H. Right of First Refusal*

Through a right of first refusal a landowner agrees to inform the City of their intention to sell a property to another party, but providing the City with the opportunity to match the best offer. A right of first refusal would not bind the City to acquire, but would give the City the opportunity to purchase if it desired.

*I. Management Agreement*

A management agreement identifies a plan according to which a property will be managed, either by the City or the landowner. It permits a landowner and the City to cooperate on managing a specific property to meet mutual objectives. While a management agreement does not provide permanent protection, it promotes cooperative stewardship of a property

*J. Bridge Financing/Land Trust*

A number of land trusts, such as the Trust for Public Land, acquire lands for public entities and then resell to the public agency on terms that are beneficial to the public. Often a land trust can move quickly and creatively to acquire property, particularly where the owner must sell the property within a short time frame or the property is threatened with development.

*K. GOCO Partnership.*

The State of Colorado, Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund (GOCO) provides funding to communities to assist in protecting and acquiring open lands.

*10. Land Exchange or Trade*

Through what is referred to as a "1031 Exchange" a private landowner may exchange one property for another and postpone or avoid paying capital gains tax as a result. This can be an effective tool in two instances. First, public entities often have surplus lands that can be traded to a private land owner for more desirable open lands. Second, the City could acquire a parcel of land to be traded for a desirable open space parcel, thereby saving the private landowner capital gain tax which could lower the cost to the City. The tax consequences of land exchanges or trades can be very beneficial to private landowners. They are also beneficial for public entities since they can reduce the funds required for acquisition. Land trades may be time consuming and may involve a high level of complexity, but can be extremely beneficial for both parties.

*11. Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)*

This technique is utilized in many states and counties on the east and west coasts. A governmental entity could purchase the development rights to open land or agricultural land in order to keep it in ranching or undeveloped. Development rights would be sold on a voluntary basis. The value of those rights usually varies from 30% to 80% of the fair market value of the property. The landowner is able to obtain the equity or development value from the property, keep the land open or in productive agriculture, keep it in the family and pass it on to the next generation, and make needed capital investments with the proceeds. When development rights are purchased, the land is permanently restricted. PDR programs are often funded by a variety of taxes including property, sales, real estate transfer and special purpose taxes as well as through general obligation bonds.

## **Regulatory Techniques**

### *12. County Right to Farm and Ranch Law*

A county right to farm and ranch ordinance protects agricultural enterprises from nuisance suits and complaints related to their agricultural activities. It gives constructive notice to potential residential landowners that agricultural activities and practices in the area will continue and may cause odors, land use practices and transportation impacts that may affect residential living.

### *13. Agricultural Zoning*

Agricultural zoning establishes a minimum size area for subdivision and identifies permissible uses. To be effective, the minimum size should be related to the minimum amount of land necessary for a viable agricultural operation. In practice, most agricultural zoning is really large lot zoning with lot sizes established at 20, 40, 80, 160 acres or larger. The effectiveness of large lot zoning depends on how firmly it is enforced and whether the lot sizes relate to an economically viable farm size. Often the agricultural zones merely serve as holding zones for later conversion to other uses. In addition, agricultural zoning is often not flexible enough to permit the sale of smaller lots if a rancher needs to generate income, yet wants to sell as little of the productive lands as possible.

### *14. Agricultural Buffer Zones*

In agricultural areas, any non-agricultural development could be required to provide separation between agricultural and non-agricultural uses to prevent non-farm uses from interfering with normal agricultural operations or creating the potential for nuisance complaints related to farm operations.

### *15. Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)*

TDR is similar to PDR in that the landowner receives compensation for the development value of the land. However, once the TDR program is established by governmental action, the system relies on the free market transfer of development rights from the open land to development areas as opposed to governmental acquisition with PDR. In order for TDR to work effectively, both "sending" and "receiving" areas need to be identified. The "sending" areas are the lands which are to be protected and the development rights from those areas can be sold to developers in identified "receiving" areas. The developers would be required to acquire development rights if they wanted to develop at greater densities than currently permitted. The transaction would take place between a willing buyer and seller so that the price for the development rights would be negotiated. Once the system is established, it can work effectively to redistribute development rights from open land to more urban areas. Establishing this system is extremely complex and may require a number of years for the community to work out all the bugs so that transfers work effectively. TDR is working in a number of counties and states around the country. This is a great concept, but it requires a significant effort to get it effectively implemented and tailored to local circumstances.

### *16. Overlay District, Site Plan Review or Performance Zoning*

An overlay district defining agricultural, natural resource, floodplain, or visual resources could be defined with either prohibitions on development in certain areas or performance or site plan criteria for development in these areas. The performance criteria would encourage residential development on lands which did not contain these special resources or in a manner which responded sensitively to these resources.

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