

DOCUMENTING HISTORY

"The big hangup in getting to designate (the Cache la Poudre River) as a Wild and Scenic River was the city of Fort Collins' concern that it would somehow change the water standard that their sewer plant has to operate on. It took me literally five years to get the bill through. I tried to work with the farmers and all the other groups."

- Hank Brown, former Colorado state senator, congressman, U.S. senator and twice a university president, referring to Colorado's only Wild and Scenic River bill for the Cache la Poudre River.

OVERVIEW

How do you create a national heritage area? Through an Act of Congress. But, who decides that a natural, cultural and/or historical landscape is worthy of Congressional attention? And, how does it move beyond just a good idea? Knowing that it took John D. Rockefeller 30 years to overcome opposition to set aside what is now Grand Teton National Park – we imagine there are some colorful characters and stories behind the formation of national parks and heritage areas. What kind of courage, controversy, commitment, and circumstances come into play?

This project will tease out the stories of people and events that shaped the Cache la Poudre River National Heritage Area (CALA). Since the time of our early ancestors, the Poudre River has been the lifeblood of northern Colorado for both wildlife and humans. Events during the days of early settlement as well as the modern demands on the Poudre River have been complex. Thus, the Poudre River contributed significantly to the development of water law and the evolution of highly complex water delivery systems. It is for this reason that Congress designated the lower part of Poudre as a River Corridor in 1996 before finally receiving the National Heritage Area (NHA) designation in 2009, which made it the first NHA west of the Mississippi River. Meanwhile, the upper part of the Cache la Poudre River was listed in 1986 as a National Wild and Scenic River, and it remains the only river with this qualification in the state of Colorado.

Students from Metro State University in Denver are pursuing research avenues to reveal the people and stories behind the formation of CALA. They are compiling information from letters, diaries, newspapers, and oral histories to capture perspectives of individuals who might not otherwise appear in historical record. By telling the history of the river that was turned into a National Heritage Area we can provide important frames of reference, a sense of identity to citizens in the river corridor, and a clearer idea of our aspirations around our river heritage.



OVERVIEW

Elements of the Documenting History Program include:

- Metro State University Journalism students conduct research through primary source materials and oral history interviews
- Metro State University History Students and Professors create text and tell the story of PHA/CALA
- Publish a coffee table book
- Publish video series

PARTNER

Metro State University, Colorado State University



GOALS & OUTCOMES

Goal:

Increase understanding of the linkages between past and present Poudre River heritage and recognize the contribution of the people who created the CALA.

Outcomes:

- Raise awareness about CALA and the Poudre Heritage Alliance
- Inspire appreciation of the Poudre River and water heritage
- Inform about the process of establishing heritage areas

BUDGET: \$40,000

- \$500 – Individual research
- \$1,500 – Video shorts production
- \$2,000 – Research and oral histories
- \$5,000 – Archival preservation at CSU
- \$10,000 – Marketing product
- \$15,000 – Publishing book

