



A TALE OF TWO COUNTIES

Transregional Planning and the
Poudre River Trail

GEORGE MONCASTER



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List of Acronyms

CDOT – Colorado Department of Transportation

CSU – Colorado State University

DMV – Department of Motor Vehicles

DRCoG – Denver Regional Council of Governments

DRHT – Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail

DTT – Designing Tomorrow Today Committee

ELC – Environmental Learning Center

FCMoD – Fort Collins Museum of Discovery

GOCO – Great Outdoors Colorado

IGA – Intergovernmental Agreement

LWCoG – Larimer-Weld Council of Governments

NFRMPO – North Front Range Metropolitan
Planning Organization

NPS – National Park Service

PHA – Poudre Heritage Alliance

PRT – Poudre River Trail

PRTB – Poudre River Trail Board

PRTC – Poudre River Trail Corridor Inc.

RMGO – Rocky Mountain Gun Owners

UNC – University of Northern Colorado

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

USFS – United States Forest Service

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Introduction

Landscapes in Northern Colorado are changing rapidly. Informal discussions in restaurants, on sidewalks, and in breweries often include concerns about the rapid pace of development. Housing, schools, and supermarkets continue to spring up across the Front Range at an unprecedented speed. Recreation, outdoor activities, and access to nature are essential to sustaining the Colorado lifestyle. The Centennial State is well-equipped to accommodate these needs. For instance, real estate websites frequently highlight recreational amenities, and listings rarely omit mention of local trails, natural areas, or river access. Trails that once were traversed by Native peoples (Arapaho, Cheyenne, Apache, Ute, and Nahua), that ferried gunpowder along the Cache La Poudre River, or that were part of the region's agricultural irrigation systems have radical new uses today. Trails now carry families out for a walk, shuttle cyclists to work, or provide routes to more strenuous rides, provide spaces for horse-riding, and offer spots to view nesting owls or other wildlife. In the face of a rapidly changing landscape, trails help connect our past and present in multiple ways. One trail demonstrates the importance of recreation in Northern Colorado: the Poudre River Trail (PRT).

Stretching some forty-three miles, the multi-use recreational PRT weaves across Northern Colorado, connecting urban centers and crisscrossing rural land. Individuals and families alike remark upon the trail as an important feature of their communities that provides relaxation and recreation. A walk along the trail's hardscape surface offers opportunities to encounter fishermen eagerly casting for trout and tourists enjoying a glass of chilled beer. The PRT allows citizens in Northern Colorado to enjoy the beauty of the riverine region at their own pace.

The construction of the PRT across multiple communities in Northern Colorado required the intervention of a cross-county governmental entity. The Larimer-Weld Council of Governments (LWCoG) led the effort, transforming county-level trail segments into a regional trail system. Larimer County began building individual trail segments as early as the 1970s. In Larimer County a centralized approach emerged early. The Fort Collins City Council provided leadership, even though not all its residents supported trail building. For example, Laporte, an unincorporated town governed by Larimer County but part of the Fort Collins metropolitan area, resisted these early efforts. Larimer County established a central planning authority within Fort Collins' Parks and Recreation Department, led by longtime director H.R. Phillips, as early as the 1960s.

In contrast, Weld County adopted a more decentralized approach, relying on private donations and a diverse group of contributors. Weld County began trail construction about a decade later than Larimer

County, using funds raised through charity and by negotiating land deals with local stakeholders, such as the Kodak plant. Both counties made progress in building trail segments during the 1970s, but it wasn't until the LWCoG pushed for a connected system in the 1980s that transregional planning took shape.

Planning and construction of a transregional recreational trail along the Cache la Poudre River has been no small undertaking. The forty-three-mile-long PRT presented financial challenges at every stage, but also offered the chance to create a trail that highlights Northern Colorado's recreational and professional opportunities. The construction process required extensive negotiation and compromise between the communities that developed along the ever-changing banks of the river. This report tells the history of the PRT's construction and uncovers the various methods that local advocates used to ensure the trail's completion. The LWCoG began to nurture transregional thinking in the 1980s, engaging with students and commissioning reports that would outline a path forward, while incorporating previous planning that had been dismissed by county-level officials. I argue that the emergence of transregional thinking, signified by the establishment of organizations operating across county lines, enabled collaboration that allowed for the construction of the PRT.

Budgets, zoning, land acquisition, and future-oriented mindsets had to be coordinated across communities that often clashed over water and industry within the region. The PRT united Northern Colorado communities under the banner of celebrating the region and its people. It is this recreational dimension that has stayed consistent in the area despite growing populations. Northern Colorado is home to a National Forest, prime trout fishing, and Rocky Mountain National Park, the latter often drawing international attention. In addition to these predominantly federal opportunities, the cluster of local natural areas, such as Watson Lake and Wellington State Wildlife Area, are administered and maintained by municipalities such as Fort Collins, Greeley, and Timnath alongside Colorado Parks and Wildlife. To the untrained eye, these areas operate smoothly, allowing visitors to ponder deep questions, listen to the squawk of migrating geese and drag boot-clad feet. But to those with an eye to local politics, questions of budgets, zoning jurisdiction, and designation become apparent.

Methodology: Trails From Past to Present

This history of the PRT is informed by scholarship on recreational trails, commuting connectivity, water management, and trans-regional recreational cooperation. For example, Anthony Bradshaw, writing in *The Town Planning Review*, considered an elemental approach to greenspace thinking and by extension, trails. Bradshaw states that "our ideas on greenspace must be turned upside-down" before outlining citizen roles in determining what and where trees, shrubbery, and trails should be placed.¹ Bradshaw's article is useful in thinking about the history of the PRT, as he goes beyond a single narrative to assess UK trail-making as

¹ Anthony Bradshaw, "Viewpoint: Greenspace in Cities: What and Where?" *The Town Planning Review* 62, no. 2 (1991): pp. 147–50.

needing revitalization. Regarding the PRT, Bradshaw's categories of citizen input are immediately applicable and see direct counterparts in groups local to Northern Colorado such as the DTT council (Designing Tomorrow Today). Bradshaw's concept of citizen input included grassroots engagement through volunteer groups and participation through surveys. Thus, Bradshaw provides a good framework for top-down trail literature but fails to tie it to any explicit examples outside of general references to Liverpool, leaving regional context ambiguous. The PRT was constructed over five decades, in the United States, from scratch, and thus is not covered by the categories.² Bradshaw writes of revitalizing existing "village greens and pathways" and, as such, while useful in informing an approach, his model has some flaws in application. There is some thinking here that can be adapted for the purposes of the PRT, yet again, Bradshaw leaves much to be desired.

Community emphasis, emerging in trail literature in the early 2000s, remains essential for analyzing the PRT. The friends of the Dalghen Railroad Heritage Trail (DRHT) form the central focus of Dawn Bowen's piece "Building a Trail and Connecting a Community," which documents a case study in Virginia. Community also emerges in Alessandro Rigolon's piece "Greenways as Educational Opportunities: Lessons from Boulder, Colorado," in which community is inverted as not leading the construction of trails but benefiting from trail development. Both stress the role of grassroots organizations, detached from structures of administration, yet able to influence the eventual outcome of the project at hand. This further builds on the framework employed by Bradshaw and provides a good element to incorporate into a methodology fit for the PRT. While community is important, balancing this focus across the variety of communities involved in the PRT is crucial to this study.

The PRT, and this study of it, have much to draw on with regards to an established field of literature, but the case study approach demonstrated by existing writing leaves room for a bespoke framework. The methodological approach to the PRT must be that does not overcomplicate its core elements and values input from stakeholders, citizen groups, and beneficiaries. These are elements that can be adapted from existing literature as demonstrated. However, a gap still exists in which these elements must be considered across a variety of regions and communities. Transregional thinking will form a crucial component, adding a layer of analysis that respects the aforementioned categories across Northern Colorado. Stakeholder input differs between Fort Collins and Greeley and must be accounted for. Similarly, the environment surrounding the PRT requires an appreciation of its original condition, which complicates simplistic narratives of revival from decay. That is not to say that the river was a pristine waterway. A 1970 film produced by the Fort Collins chapter of the American Association of University Women highlights the challenges facing the river at that time, primarily concerned with the impact of industry on the lower portion.³ Later concerns would

² Bradshaw and his British inclusion are but one piece of literature that falls outside of self-decided norms for trail writing and may at first appear an odd inclusion. He has been included here as the best demonstration of changes across time in trail planning, and to recognize the influence of transnational developments in the field. Another article which almost made it into the body of this text is "Coastal Greenways: Interdisciplinary and Integration Challenges for the Management of Developed Coastal Areas," by J. C. Ferreira et al. While useful, it's coastal specific subject is far removed from landlocked Colorado and as such has not been included.

³ "The Lower Poudre: A Time for Action (1970)," *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, 2024, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.coloradoan.com/videos/news/2016/05/06/83974316/>.

materialize in a series of cleanup projects, including the restoration of a former gas plant along the banks of the Cache la Poudre in Fort Collins and establishment of the Northside Aztlan Community Center in 2007.⁴ Finally, the approach to the PRT must consider community, imagined community and regional community in order to be truly beneficial. With these criteria satisfied, a thorough study of the PRT will demonstrate an addition to trail literature that currently does not exist, between removed top-down analysis, and analysis rooted in a singular locale.

Previous literature on trail construction and urban revival projects is extensive but a survey reveals that the PRT is distinctive. Projects such as the Davis Greenway and the revitalization of the South Platte in Denver are useful for considering power relationships between civilian groups and municipal authorities, yet those studies fall exclusively within the purview of a single governmental authority, be it the Davis or Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG). The PRT, by contrast, is a collaboration between two county governments, an inter-county government, and a plethora of individuals acting outside of these frameworks. Planners in the region, faced with increasing development are already confronting challenges that require collaboration across political and jurisdictional boundaries. The PRT project offers a case study in how these challenges can be traversed.⁵

Scholarship about place has also informed this study of the PRT. Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan pioneered sense of place thinking in the late 1970s with a series of articles on the subject. Writing in *Humanistic Geography*, Tuan argued that physical locations could take on an emotional meaning through land use and relationships. Exigencies could be as simple as time spent outdoors relaxing, or as complex as pilgrimage to a site or location. Users of the PRT may have formed an emotional attachment to the trail through recreational use, deepening their connection to the project and its history. Geographer Doreen Massey expanded upon Tuan's theory of place through her own work, intersecting emotional construction with gendered experiences of place. Massey's gendered approach reveals that individuals may respond differently to a physical place based on their lived experiences. This is important to consider when evaluating individual testimonies of trail users. For example, users' reception of the PRT may differ on a variety of factors, including where visitors grew up, occupations, and familiarity with the region.⁶

Additionally, the role of developers is critical to the history of the PRT. As described by Aaron Fodge at the City of Fort Collins, the concept of "development paying its way" is present in this text. In essence, this planning philosophy is implicit across the study, and many of the documents concerned. Developers in the region have been directly involved in the progression of trail construction and planning, and often have been required to incorporate trail considerations in conversations with local authorities. One brief example can be found in the revitalization of the Bender Mobile Home Park, which Gino Campana purchased in 2012.

⁴ Kevin Duggan, "Fort Collins Targets Northside Contaminated Sites," *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, August 4, 2016, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.coloradoan.com/story/money/2016/08/04/fort-collins-targets-northside-contaminated-sites/88038916/>.

⁵ Stanton Jones and Mark Francis, "The Davis Greenway: A Case Study of a Diversified System of Open Space, Trails, and Wildlife Habitat for the City of Davis, California," in *Parkways, Greenways, Riverways*, ed. Woodward S. Bousquet and Thomas E. Rash, pp. 160–76 (Boone, NC: Appalachian State University, 1989). See also Anthony Bradshaw, "Viewpoint: Greenspace in Cities: What and Where?"

⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, "Humanistic Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66, no. 2 (1976): 266–76.

The site was cleared of debris, rubble, and non-native trees; Campana preserved older forms of vegetation and added a trail stub that provided access to the PRT.⁷

Research for this project has been conducted using several archives, primarily the collections available at Colorado State University, the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, and digitized newspaper collections. Archives at the Museum of Greeley also provided rich material. In addition to these collections, this history incorporates resources from municipal governments that have been critical to the success of the trail, including Fort Collins, Greeley, and Windsor. As the trail intercepted larger corridors across the state, larger entities became involved to varying extents. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) played a role in planning, as the trail crossed the barrier presented by I-25. CDOT also provided documentation that has supported this work. A large wealth of information was also gleaned from the offices of the Poudre River Trail Corridor Inc. (PRTC). These previously unseen records have been critical to the understanding of early operations along the trail, as well as the relationships the non-profit maintained with stakeholders and municipal authorities. The author and project team also conducted several oral history interviews during the summer of 2024, which are publicly available at the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery (FCMoD). Oral histories have greatly aided this work by establishing the relationship between different periods and sources. Additional mention should be given to the North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization (NFRMPO) which operates as a spiritual successor to the LWCoG and provided research materials.

The Poudre River Trail History project, which also includes a StoryMap along with this written history, was funded through several entities. The Cache la Poudre National Heritage Area provided support through Community Grant Project funding. Financial support for the project also came from the City of Ft. Collins, City of Greeley, Town of Timnath, and Larimer County. Finally, Colorado State University provided financial and administrative support of this work. The wide variety of parties involved here hints at the challenge posed by a trans-county project; the history of the PRT is crucial for future planners operating in the region.

⁷ Pat Ferrier, "Pateros Creek Neighborhood Rises from Mobile Home Remnants," *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, June 30, 2015, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.coloradoan.com/story/money/2015/06/30/pateros-creek-fort-collins-housing/29538971/>.

Chapter 1:

A Background of the River and Early Trail-Building

The Cache La Poudre River: A Defining Watershed

Writing in his 1976 work *The Poudre River*, John S. Gray tried to capture the essence of what the river meant to the people of Northern Colorado. In it, he confidently states:

The Cache la Poudre River, known affectionately as “the Poudre,” roars as a cataract and murmurs as a placid stream. Its setting switches abruptly from spectacular mountains to treeless flatlands. It winds through empty wilderness and populous cities. It furnishes playtime recreation and workaday irrigation. It is a river of variety.⁸

Written as an advertisement for the river, the text documents the watershed and its key historical moments for the state’s 1976 Centennial celebration. Gray strives to inform the reader about the river, the battles between settlers and Indigenous groups along its banks, and the colorful cast of stereotyped Westerners. Understanding how people understood the watershed in the 1960s and 1970s is useful for interpreting the actions of those involved with the PRT. Northern Coloradans’ decisions and projects were guided by what the river represented and what they believed the trail should celebrate. Undoubtedly, decision-makers aimed to create a legacy project for future generations to use.

Gray’s description of the river as one of variety remains true today. Beyond its physical characteristics, however, is the range of approaches taken along the Cache La Poudre’s banks to construct a transregional trail. Since Gray wrote from the perspective of Larimer County residents, it is fitting to also consider a historical interpretation of the river from the Weld County viewpoint.

Produced in 1994 to celebrate Weld County Trail Day, an authorless brochure, attributed only to “Bob,” documents the history of the Cache la Poudre River. In the brochure, Bob describes the river as:

⁸ John S. Gray, *The Poudre River* (Denver: Gro-Pub Group. 1976), p. 5.

“...a backbone in the development of an important agricultural region. It is a microcosm of Western development.” Bob saw the river as a model for regional-scale Western expansion, further illustrated by his timeline, which only briefly covers the archaeological era, the Louisiana Purchase, and the establishment of Fort Collins before focusing in more depth on developments of the 1970s. Here, Bob gets specific. He lists the establishment of the Centennial Commission in Greeley, which began a brief study into the possibility of a trail across Northern Colorado. The Centennial study was followed by a 1984 feasibility study into the matter, then a series of public meetings in 1988. Bob adds that the Poudre River Greenway plan, adopted in 1990, primarily aimed to preserve space along the river corridor. He concludes with the 1994 establishment of the Poudre River Trail Board (PRTB), marking the same year as the Weld County Trail Day event for which the brochure was produced.⁹

Bob’s timeline, compared to some of Gray’s descriptions, highlights that Weld and Larimer Counties had largely similar conceptions of the river; however, to support that shared vision, they drew on different examples. This trend would be seen time and time again as the two counties began trail projects that would eventually become the PRT. Logistical questions of funding, maintenance, law and construction were challenges enough, especially considering how zoning differed between the two counties. The divergence in the feasibility and practicality of trail construction would only add to the obstacles that trail planners and citizens had to overcome to construct something worth walking on, cycling across, as well as speaking and writing about.

Larimer County: Fort Collins and H. R. Phillips

Trail building in Larimer County occurred mainly through central planning concentrated in the City of Fort Collins as early as the 1970s. In the decade before, the city had adopted plans to expand recreational opportunities, with the acquisition of land that still serves the community today. Sites such as Troutman Park and City Park were acquired during the 1960s and once stood on the outskirts of urban development. Forty-six acres were purchased in 1971 using Department of Interior funding totaling \$62,500, to serve as flood defense in addition to providing greenspace. Civilian engagement also had an established legacy, with the thirty-two-member strong Designing Tomorrow Today (DTT) committee providing input on planning across the city. Alongside guiding land acquisition, the DTT group produced reports and submitted them to the city council, with one emphasizing the desire to have the city “request a federal planning grant to develop a comprehensive community plan which would include cultural and recreational facilities.”¹⁰ Planners in

⁹ “Bob,” Weld County Trail Day Brochure, p. 3, folder “History,” PRTC Offices, Windsor, CO [hereafter PRTC].

¹⁰ Fort Collins Parks & Recreation Department, “Parks and Recreation Scrapbook (1971-1974),” Oversized Scrapbook, Fort Collins, CO, 1974 1971, Fort Collins Parks & Recreation Collection, Fort Collins Museum of Discovery [hereafter FCMOD]. As a further note, in references to these scrapbooks, no page numbers have been listed due to the original documents lacking page numbers themselves. Additionally, newspaper items cited from archives have been provided with all information required to retrieve them, specifically regarding items from the Greeley Archive.

Larimer County were engaged with state and federal entities, civilian groups, and forward-thinking. Crucial to this process was the role of municipal authority in coordinating these engagements, and municipal authority was wielded by H. R. Phillips.¹¹

Before Phillips's tenure, the head role at the Fort Collins Park and Recreation Department had been filled by short-term leaders, but Phillips aimed to bring lasting change. The man who would implement many of the recreational facilities well used in Fort Collins originally arrived from Kansas, having worked as a recreation manager for a grain plant during the 1950s. Alongside floating ideas of public pools and denying attempts to establish an ice rink (a repeated request over the two decades of service), the head of the Park and Recreation Department developed vast sections of trails within the city. Phillips travelled too. In 1971, he attended a week-long National Parks and Recreation conference in Houston. In 1973, he visited students at Colorado State University (CSU) during a class on recreation management, and the year after received the honor of being named Fort Collins Citizen of the Year by the city's board of realtors. Further, Phillips communicated with other cities across the Front Range, often visiting Boulder to glean information on the benefits of asphalt or concrete. Having begun his work in 1962, a decade later Phillips was acquiring some \$383,500 in Bureau of Outdoor Recreation grants, for the "development of local parks and recreation facilities." These facilities included the development of Lee Martinez Park in northwest Fort Collins, stretching along the south bank of the Cache la Poudre River. In the month of May 1978, the sections of a riverside trail were mapped out, and ground broken by Fort Collins Parks and Recreation staff. Phillip's engagement with national sources of funding, and his authority to apply it would result in over seventy-two parcels of land being acquired, and over \$1 million total committed to an integrated trail plan within the city and Laporte.¹² That same amount is equivalent to almost \$5 million in 2024.

Funding of that scale fell short however, leading the city to introduce a new tax to cover the deficit. In 1973, the general tax rate was increased by 1% and was dubbed the "one cent bill." Predictably, during the overall strife suffered nationally following the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) oil embargo between 1973 and 1974, the policy was criticized and judged by concerned citizens. Residents of Laporte initially voiced criticism privately, which later grew into more organized opposition. City dignitaries met to cut the ribbon at Lee Martinez Park in late 1980, celebrating the connection of Horsetooth (a trail alongside the east base of Horsetooth reservoir), Spring Creek, and Cache la Poudre Trail having formed a triangle across the city. Important to note here also is the choice of materials for the trails.

Spring Creek and the Cache la Poudre Trail had initially been constructed as asphalt tracks, spanning eight feet across and four inches deep into the loamy soil. By comparison, the Horsetooth trail had been constructed as an impacted soil track, which while softer on the feet, prevented the regular use of larger bicycles and prams. By the mid-1980s, these asphalt tracks would eventually be replaced, largely under the supervision of Craig Foreman, who served as a civil engineer within the Parks and Recreation department. Alongside teams from the Right of Way group, Foreman secured funding to replace the asphalt with concrete

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

and deepen the slabs by an inch. Further, the spacing on the Spring Creek and Cache la Poudre trail had been expanded to eight feet, and a micro plastic filament introduced to the material to prevent cracking and improve the longevity of the slabs.¹³

While glasses clinked in celebration, residents in Laporte mounted a tangible resistance to the development, building on previous agitations that the “one-cent bill” had spurred. At a community meeting City Manager John Arnold was subjected to verbal rejection, as Laporte residents disputed the prior approval of a plan put together in 1973. *The Coloradoan* paper captures some of these objections making clear the division. Laporte residents stated, “The people from Fort Collins voted, but we’re not in Fort Collins,” and, “This is a city trail. Put it in the city.”¹⁴ Arnold, communicating plans drawn up under Phillips’s guidance almost a decade prior, eventually compromised, and the planned route shifted to a more southern course which now occupies an informal gap between the two communities.¹⁵

By 1986, disputes over the project had been largely settled, and the trail system triangle within Fort Collins and Laporte inched closer to completion. Among locals and beyond, trail building in Larimer County was well-received, even garnering some international attention. A visiting West German intern called Silke Krieg arrived in 1986 to study under Phillips and his department. Krieg commented in *The Coloradoan* that the city had a good reputation for public transport and accessible trails, although this paled in comparison to European metropolises. With little diplomatic grace, Krieg laid out her opinions in black and white, stating that “Yours are almost nothing, in Germany we have bikeways everywhere by themselves, not just a white line on the street.” Phillips responded by doubling his efforts. By 1986, Phillips had overseen grants from state and federal entities amounting to over \$7 million and had engaged in conversation with planners from across the country. Best practices from national conferences took form as the “triangle network” in Fort Collins and adjacent settlements.¹⁶

Little, however, had been done to establish an urban greenbelt as had been suggested by Krieg in her same column in the *Coloradoan*. In fact, little else would be done by Phillips. In that same year Phillips would be recognized for his efforts. In his honor, a festival bluntly named the H.R. Phillips Festival was held in June of 1986. Kelly Ohlson, the mayor of Fort Collins at the time, signed an open proclamation recognizing the contributions of Phillips, including a dedication “to the highest ideals of integrity, performance and professionalism” as well as “outstanding parks, bicycle trails, tennis courts, golf courses, playgrounds, ballfields and other facilities.”¹⁷ Somewhat ironically then, in 1988 Phillips would resign, after admitting to violating city policy during his tenure. Later, found guilty of embezzlement, investigators would find \$18,000 worth of equipment on his property, pinched from city storage. Additionally, Phillips admitted to spending

¹³ Craig Foreman, oral history interview by George Moncaster, Fort Collins, 2024 (to be archived at FCMOD).

¹⁴ Fort Collins Parks & Recreation Department. “Parks and Recreation Scrapbook (1975-1978),” Oversized Scrapbook, Fort Collins, CO, 1978 1975., FCMOD.

¹⁵ Fort Collins Parks & Recreation Department. “Parks and Recreation Scrapbook (1984-1986),” Oversized Scrapbook, Fort Collins, CO, 1986 1984, Fort Collins Parks & Recreation Collection, FCMOD.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

city money on various functions including Christmas parties, although no evidence suggested that he had misallocated funds for the festival held in his honor. Local news outlets covered the case in excruciating detail, and papers as far as Denver picked up the story. With a maximum penalty of eight years and a \$500,000 fine looming, the city waited in anticipation of the District Attorney's decision. Arnold, loyal to the end, took to the stand to defend the man who had tasked him with communicating proposals to Laporte. Dwain Miller, a former peer and head of Parks and Recreation in Boulder also spoke to Phillips' dedication to public work, noting the plethora of awards that had been earned by Fort Collins during Phillips's tenure. Finally, it was decided that Phillips's error would be best treated with a single year of probation in Fort Collins, below half the minimum sentence for embezzlement of which he was found guilty.¹⁸

The drama and spectacle captured in Phillips's trial is a peculiar piece of local history. While Phillips mulled on the trial, his method of trail building effectively stalled as engagement with federal and state entities slowed. Fort Collins and Laporte had come into conflict and continued to do so through the latter half of the 1980s, and early 1990s, as efforts extending the trail faltered at the old Rex Line, a Burlington Northern Santa Fe route that had ceased operation. Despite these setbacks, it was clear that central planning had achieved results. The awards established Larimer as a county with leading approaches to trail building nationally, and the triangle system totaled some fifty-three miles across the landscape. Of note was the Poudre trail, then ending just west of Overland Trail on the western limit of Fort Collins and starting just north of Vine Drive. This section, completed as part of the triangle, would become the county's foundational element in the integrated system to come. While rumblings of a greenbelt had been mentioned piecemeal, this section was achieved through engagement with central planning and a concentration of authority in municipal authority. Establishing such a trail hadn't been without its troubles, the PRT did by 1990 however, effectively service the growing population of the county.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹Fort Collins Parks & Recreation Department. "Parks and Recreation Scrapbook (1987-1988)," Oversized Scrapbook, Fort Collins, CO, 1988 1987, Fort Collins Parks & Recreation Collection, FCMOD.

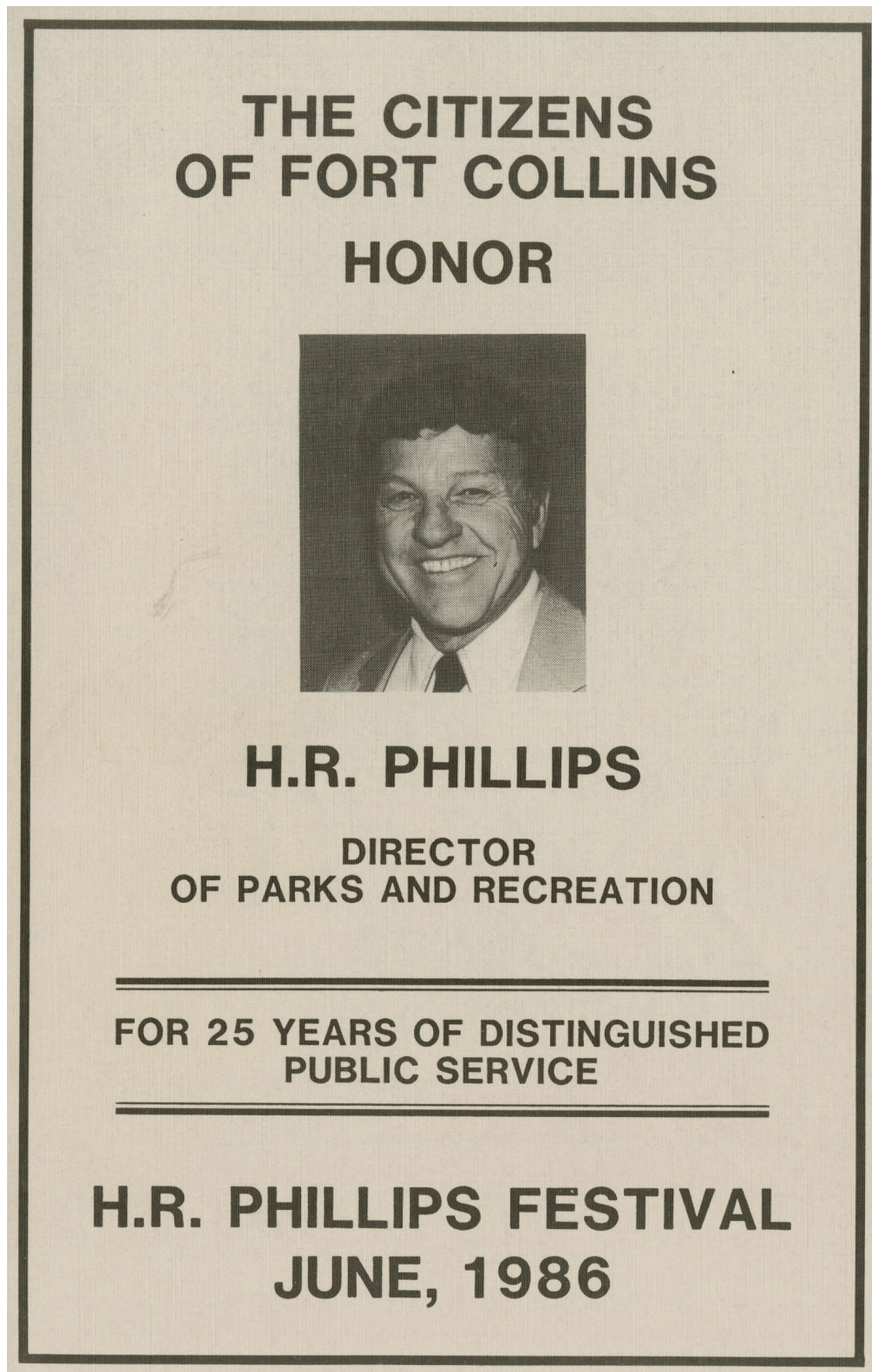


Figure 1. H.R. Phillips Festival Program Cover, ca. 1986. *Courtesy of the Ft. Collins Museum of Discovery, Phillips Program, Fort Collins Parks and Recreation Scrapbook.*

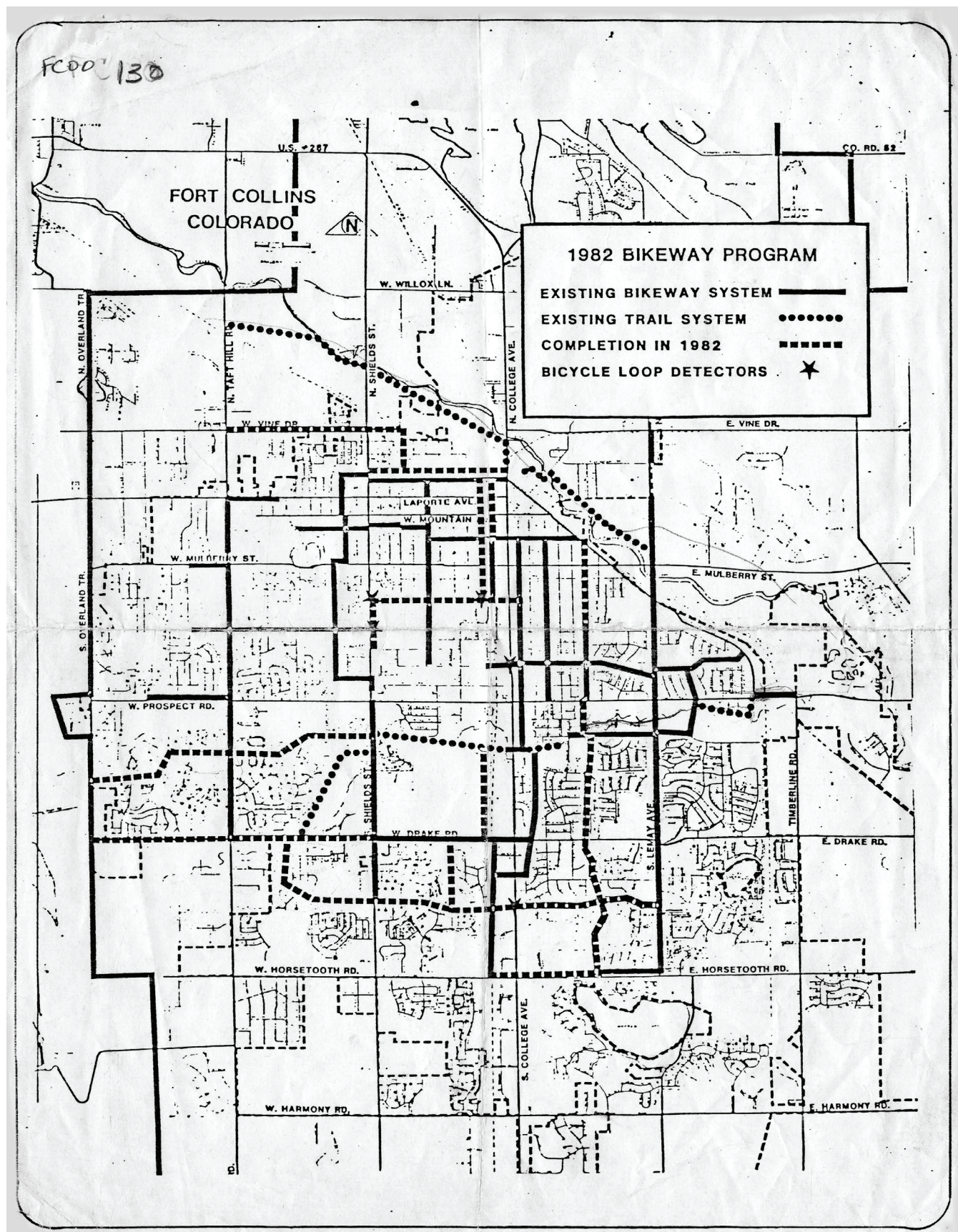


Figure 2. 1982 Bikeway Program, ca. 1982. Courtesy of the Ft. Collins Museum of Discovery, no. FC00130, Historic Maps Collection. Digital copy available at <https://fchc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/hm/id/965/rec/1>.

Weld County: An Alternative

Trail building in neighboring Weld County was equally successful but relied more on private efforts than on central municipal planning. The Union Colony, founded in the 19th century, established Greeley as Weld County's largest settlement. The area has maintained a strong agricultural focus and a reputation for "high moral standards," which evolved into a conservative mindset by the 20th century. Whereas the presence of CSU attracted more progressive political alignment in Larimer, Weld held true to its ideals, and its largest employer remains agriculture. The county produced over \$1 billion of crop goods in 2023 alone. In present-day Greeley, it would be difficult to miss the influence of Jose Batista Sobrinho (JBS), a meatpacking plant that provides income for the county's population, and an in-locale way to process the products of Greeley's fields and feedlots. The Weld County government asserts its belief in policies that "support a high-quality rural character" and respect "agricultural heritage and traditional agricultural land uses of the county." No one championed these values during the latter half of the twentieth century more so than a senator from the area, Hank Brown.²⁰

George "Hanks" Brown was born in Denver in 1940 and trained in law at the University of Colorado before his successful election to the House of Representatives in 1980, and the Senate in 1990. Having served in the Navy, Brown embodied much of the rhetoric surrounding Weld County's rough and ready approach to industry, and later recreation. Unlike Phillips however, this national engagement would be guided in other directions, instead of solely focused on developing trails. At a 1988 meeting to discuss funding for the PRT, Brown was scheduled to speak but withdrew at the last moment due to commitments in Washington, DC, which had drawn him back into the national sphere. At the same meeting, the city planner for Greeley, Steve Hill, engaged with the seventy-five attendees. The *Greeley Tribune* notes that amongst the concerns, the chief was landowners, and land use rights along the riverbank. Although both Larimer and Weld residents valued their land, their approaches to land use differed. Property easements became the main mechanism by which planners achieved trail building.²¹ Landowners allowed the county government to use parts of their land for the trail, while keeping ownership. With land use dealt with for the time being, finance became the next main issue of debate. Representatives from the National Park Service (NPS), in attendance at the behest of the City of Greeley, suggested using funds from the Land and Water Trust Fund. This was a national pot of money that had been established in 1965 to acquire parcels for public use. Crucially, however, the meeting concluded with the discussion of raising funds via community groups. Organizing such a community, however, would require someone who could dedicate more time on site than Brown, someone who found their work not in the halls of DC, but rather in the single hall of a small legal firm in Greeley.

²⁰ Weld County Government, "Right to Farm - Agriculture in Weld County," 2024, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.weld.gov/Government/Departments/Planning-and-Zoning/Right-to-Farm-Agriculture-in-Weld-County#:~:text=Weld%20County%20is%20an%20agricultural,the%20state's%20leading%20dairy%20producer.>

²¹ Easements for those unversed in legal terminology are agreements by which land ownership itself is not exchanged, rather landowners grant permission for agreed and defined uses—in this case the ability to traverse property along a set route.

Fred Otis was critical in negotiating land acquisition and corroborating community groups during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Having grown up in Greeley, Otis first found his footing after graduating from the University of Kansas working as a Special Agent for the FBI between 1971 and 1976. Following service, he returned to Greeley and sat on the Weld County Planning Commission for the remainder of the decade and beyond. These years spent judging zoning issues no doubt gave Otis a firm background in local real estate law, skills which he would employ in securing land for an emerging PRT network. Trail building had occurred in Greeley on a smaller scale than in Fort Collins and Larimer County, yet the idea of a trail along the Cache la Poudre had been in the mind of the community just the same. By the late 1980s, trail building had been discussed between the Town of Windsor in western Weld County and Greeley itself. Otis, however, was focused on the larger picture. The Eastman Kodak company, best known for its rolls of 35mm analogue film, occupied a parcel of land between the two settlements, and the chemical nature of the manufacturing process posed a serious barrier to trail construction and personal safety. Potassium dichromate and chlorochromate have long been regarded as carcinogens particularly when airborne, and increased footfall despite factory containment was a large concern.

Kodak, since establishing itself in the area in the late 1960s, had approached community relationships with open arms. The company had made contributions to the infrastructure of Windsor repeatedly, including paying for sewer development in the expanding township.²² Otis, leading a group of planners from Greeley, approached the Kodak company and proposed an agreement which would ensure that the trail could pass through Eastman Park. The site had already been donated to the community by the company some years before, however land use and the presence of the trail proved a sticking point, as it promised higher footfall and exposure to potentially dangerous working environments. While the plant did not actively pollute the local area, the potential damage in the event of an accident still caused concern. After some back and forth however, Otis secured the cooperation of the company, using Colorado state law 33-41-103, which absolves landowners of responsibility for recreation purposes.²³ This agreement, amongst several others such as local aggregate processing concerns and an oil drilling site, allowed construction to proceed—if the funding could be found.²⁴

Following the precedent established at the 1988 community meeting in Weld County, private charity would form the bulk of finance for the Weld efforts at construction. Important to note here is that community engagement included citizens of Weld County both rich and poor. Many of the commercial concerns along the banks of the river, including an aggregate plant, perceived themselves as part of the community rather than a separate business interest. The Water Valley sand-mining operation, owned by Martin Lind and Steve Watson fell in the path of the trail. Instead of resisting the proposed routes, as was

²² Fred Otis, oral history interview by George Moncaster, Greeley, 2024 (to be archived at FCMOD).

²³ Colorado General Assembly, "C.R.S. 33-41-103 – Limitation on Landowner's Liability (2023)," Public Law. 2023. https://colorado.public.law/statutes/crs_33-41-103. This state law has undergone several revisions since the period of study, although it maintains the ability to absolve liability.

²⁴ Barbara Marquand, "Support Key to Poudre River Trail," *Greeley Tribune*, April 25, 1987, Hazel E. Johnson Research Center [hereafter HEJRC].

seen in Laporte years earlier, the developers donated three miles of riverbank land. Further, they contributed some \$175,000 to an emerging construction fund. The motives of the Water Valley group were not entirely altruistic however, as the pair would go on to develop a housing complex on the south side of Windsor totaling some 1500 acres. Undoubtedly, the trail would raise the value of the development. Nonetheless the donation allowed the trail to progress. Another well-to-do, George Hall, owner of Hall-Irwin Construction Co. donated eighty acres from his family's holdings, stating that the trail would serve as "a legacy for future generations."²⁵ His donation was valued at some \$250,000 (\$665,000 in 2024). Further, Hall insisted that he wanted to do something for "Greeley and Weld County", strengthening his ties to the community, and potential clients. Craig Harrison, founder of Harrison Resource Corporation in Fort Collins provided some insight into the manner of operation in Weld County. Speaking to the *Greeley Tribune*, he noted that "When Fort Collins built the trail, a lot of tax money was used on the construction. But this is typical of Weld County. When they want something done, they go out and raise the money to do it."²⁶

Outside of donations of land, donations of time and skill were apparent too. Mike Ketterling, owner of KBN Engineering in Greeley was critical to construction of the trail. Ketterling, Otis, and the Kodak company would be honored for their contributions in 1998 at the second PRTC "trailabration." The Kodak company being given the first Poudre Trail Landowner Award for their part. Ranching families, some of the earliest settlers in Weld County, chipped in too. The Noffsinger, Hoshiko, and Farr families traded long held (and long coveted) water rights for cash, donating the total sum of \$50,000 towards the construction of a footbridge just west of Missile Park, and south of the Kodak company holdings. Management of construction was likewise overseen by Tom Selders, owner of Big R Manufacturing. Rather than being paid outright, Selders donated his own time free of charge to oversee the construction personally. These donations were not the only ones made. Instead, these donations represent a selection retrieved from archival evidence. The donations described here do not account for the total amount raised for the trail during this period either. Donations also came from sources that cannot be identified with many parties opting to remain anonymous.

Through a combination of private individuals, public representatives with shared interests, and donations of time, the PRT in Weld County was put together in separate pieces. This process occurred without mass appeal to state and federal sources of funding. The scheme had admittedly started somewhat later than in Larimer County and with more focus on the possibility of an interconnected system between Windsor and Greeley. Individuals still played a role, as they had done in Larimer County, yet this time the influence applied came from differing sources of power. Private Weld County residents (not County government) leveraged their businesses and personal skills. Many industrial concerns had presidents in close conversation with each other, and some filled multiple roles as business owners and community leaders. This shared responsibility blurred the often-clear line between business and community. The Hoshiko family, and Martin Lind had grown up Weld, and actively desired to see the county improved; they

²⁵ Bill Jackson, "In-Kind Gifts Contribute to the Legacy of Poudre River Trail," *Greeley Tribune*, January 25, 1998, HEJRC.

²⁶ Jackson, "In-Kind Gifts Contribute to the Legacy of Poudre River Trail."

had a personal interest in assisting. Even when faced with the barrier posed by a national company such as Kodak, local experts stepped up to communicate and negotiate land use. With trail sections having been constructed in separate areas in both counties, the matter of both meeting would involve more than laying concrete up to the county line. The very identities and methods of both communities would have to come into contact, both physically and culturally.

The Emergence of Transregional Planning: The Larimer-Weld Council of Governments

Both counties developed trail systems independently. It wasn't until the Larimer-Weld Council of Governments (LWCoG) initiated a connected system that both counties engaged in transregional planning. This effort ultimately led to the completion of the PRT. The exact establishment of the LWCoG is unclear, however, it is known that the group dealt with utility concerns regarding both counties. Newspaper articles produced in the late twentieth century discuss the LWCoG connecting power grids, tackling water pollution in the canals of the region and air quality. The board was made up of councilors from local settlements, including Fort Collins and Greeley. The LWCoG largely deals with land use still, although in the current day, the North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization (NFRMPO) is tasked with distributing federal funds to transportation projects such as the PRT. CDOT also plays a bigger role than it did some thirty years ago, with the two organizations regularly in contact regarding improvements to transport, most recently the advancement of a front-range train line. Coordination between Weld and Larimer County could only occur with the LWCoG's guidance, and board members looked to students in the emerging recreation and landscaping disciplines for assistance in conceptualizing a transregional trail system.

In the summer of 1975, Jacquelyn C. Koirtyohann had just completed her master's degree at CSU. Presumably, the student had marveled at the changing city, perhaps having heard stories of the campus "beer-in" some half a decade ago. Perhaps she had even witnessed or participated in the series of anti-war protests that had ended with the burning of Old Main in 1970. Maybe she had watched the college football team, the CSU Rams, narrowly fight and end the season at a close 6-5 in 1975. In any case, Koirtyohann was most likely preoccupied with finishing her final dissertation, titled plainly as *Cache La Poudre Trail Interpretive Plan*. The extensive document contains Koirtyohann's proposal for developing a trail along the river corridor, limited in its reach to just east of the city's boundaries, but reaching further north up the Poudre Canyon. Crucial to note is that Koirtyohann was responding to a proposal put forward in 1974 by the city's Planning Division of Community to designate the Cache La Poudre's immediate riverbanks as open space. Koirtyohann's response, to develop a trail that crossed through Laporte and into more rural areas demonstrates transregional thinking, although still limited to Larimer County. Still, her conception of a trail that existed beyond the confines of Fort Collins and Laporte is remarkable not only for illustrating the strain of thinking that existed both in a student and her advisors, but also the proposal from the development

committee. While there is no record of Koirtyohann's proposal reaching the Fort Collins Parks and Recreation Department, the proposal was influential for later planning efforts. What is clear, is that it was cited by a group of students almost a decade later.²⁷

In 1983, LWCoG director Larry Pearson wrote a letter to the College of Design and Planning at the University of Colorado, Denver. Within it, Pearson had inquired about the possibility of having the college prepare a feasibility study. The study was to develop a plan for an integrated trail system, between Fort Collins and Greeley, stretching through Windsor, and past Laporte. Professor Jerry Shapins put his twenty-three-strong class of landscape architecture planners working with the Center for Community Design and Development up to the task. Over the fall semester, students produced two large research booklets, the first concerned with the existing infrastructure and geology of the corridor and the second with a suggested plan for development. Titled the *Environmental Sourcebook*, the first document delved deep into the geological history of the Cache la Poudre, including soil analysis, as well as robust assessments of the corridor's waterfowl population. The students noted the area's predominant crops, and the large concentrations of agricultural use, unsurprisingly predominant in Weld more so than in Larimer County. Further, the students assessed the historical landscape, recounting histories of early settlement, sites of prominence, and concluded by stating that "man's survival, economically and socially, has depended on the river."²⁸

Additionally, students produced profiles on each settlement that would be crossed by their proposed route, noting demographic information alongside predominant occupations and land usage. Most critical was the dedication of a third of the text to planning considerations, broken into two parts concerning Larimer County and Weld County. For Larimer County, the students noted the potential issues represented by an aggregate mining operation but stressed that this paled in comparison to the advantages posed by the existing trail network. Further, the students identified sources of federal funding, and explicitly "no zoning conflicts with Larimer County."²⁹ The students had recognized the defining features of trail building and recreation in Larimer County and hoped to leverage these aspects into something resembling transregional negotiation. Students also noted the potential for the upper area of the river to be designated as "Wild and Scenic", which would bring additional funding and authority to entities charged with the development of the trail system. This designation would be applied in 1986 by Congress, completing another part of the legislative puzzle. In Weld, the students also noted no conflict with the county's zoning preferences, however specified the section as "Weld/Windsor/Greeley" perhaps recognizing the less concentrated nature of authority in the area. Further, students referenced a series of comprehensive plans produced by Weld County that had encouraged open space and recreation but noted the lack of a fully integrated county trail system.³⁰

²⁷ Jacquelyn Koirtyohann, "Cache La Poudre Trail Interpretive Plan," Colorado State University, Department of Recreation Resources, 1975, Colorado State University Archive [hereafter CSU Archive].

²⁸ Landscape Architecture Program, College of Design and Planning, "Cache La Poudre Riverway Trail Study Part 1 Environmental Sourcebook," p. 60, University of Colorado Denver, 1983, folder 26, box 6, Water Resource Collection, CSU Archive.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p 79.

The document was detailed in its recommendations for the construction of the PRT. One of the chief recommendations was for clear management, and to “Establish the organization structure in a foundation format” for which the authors cited the Platte River Greenway Foundation as one example.³¹ In layman’s terms, this essentially gave the basis for the formation of a single entity charged with managing the construction of the trail across counties. The organization would be made up of local members from each settlement’s existing council and recreation department but also recognize the input of civilian leaders such as Otis, Brown, and Lind. Further, the students encouraged intergovernmental planning, and inter-jurisdiction cooperation with the region’s largest private employers, including the Kodak plant first and foremost. CDOT was recommended for inclusion in the planning process, and LWCoG was credited with initiating the planning process. The establishment of a foundation would allow planners to focus on the trail solely, rather than splitting attention to other infrastructure issues that the LWCoG faced. The importance of the feasibility study undertaken in 1983 cannot be understated. It serves as an official blueprint that incorporated the parallel threads of recreation across both counties. Its recommendations included the voices of groups that had previously been visible to each other, but out of alignment, and siloed into respective regions. Crucially, the document was the foundation upon which the Poudre River Trail Board (PRTB) was established in 1994. A body that was comprised of representatives from primarily Weld County, finally working within a single entity that could operate as a touchstone for managing contractors and land deals. Fred Otis took the position of chair. Once this central body had been established, both counties accepted the idea of a transregional trail earnestly and made swift movements to align planning. Weld County now had a group that could converse on equal terms with Larimer’s central planning in Fort Collins.³²

The PRTB produced a master plan of its own in 1995. Dubbed the *Poudre River Trail Master Plan*, it built on the work completed in Denver over a decade before and specified a route that crossed through now not only Windsor and Greeley, but specific sites including Missile Silo Park, a German prisoner of war camp, and etched cliff faces. Every inch of the nineteen miles had been assigned an estimated cost, and the plan continued to stress private charity in its section concerning maintenance. Further, just a year later the first attempts to federally designate the lower portion of the river as a National Heritage Area were made. To amplify these efforts, the PHA was established in 2002, which included another working group of individuals from both counties. Although concerned with the broader goal of preserving local history, and furthering education on the river’s importance in terms of culture, heritage, and ecology, the group supported the board and Larimer in cooperating proposals for construction and planning.³³

By the late 1990s, the PRT had taken on a life of its own. While the LWCoG had played a critical role in generating momentum for an integrated trail plan, it quickly gave way to task-specific organizations such as

³¹ Ibid.

³² Poudre River Trail Corridor Inc., “Frequently Asked Questions,” 2024, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://poudretrail.org/faq/>.

³³ Poudre Heritage Alliance, “Frequently Asked Questions,” Cache La Poudre National Heritage Area, 2024, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://poudreheritage.org/frequently-asked-questions/>.

the PRTB and PHA. With the establishment of the PRTB, and the continuing efforts to designate the lower river as a National Heritage Area, transregional planning became the norm for groups that had previously operated in isolation. These transregional bodies incorporated not only local concerns, but also larger entities by design, and combined methods from both counties learned experience of trail building. Further, these groups put civilian and municipal leaders such as the successors of Phillips, and Fred Otis in regular conversation with each other. Work could be done that involved a consideration for individual townships as well as industry and could acquire funding from both private and federal sources. While the model remained in its infancy, the LWCoG had effectively begun the process by which transregional thinking would flourish, and put disparate trail segments on the same, shared map.

Two Counties: A Unique Trail Plan

In its early stages, the PRT was constructed as separate sections in both Weld and Larimer County. Planners in settlements had little intention or conception of constructing an integrated and transregional trail system. While Fort Collins produced a trail network to be proud of, planners from the city encountered local resistance and ultimately had to adapt plans to construct parts of the PRT. Larimer County relied primarily on centralized power to raise funding, represented by the 1 cent tax increase. The county also relied on central planning to achieve its goals, with individuals such as H.R. Phillips given municipal authority to streamline and keep small the working group given the responsibility to make final judgments on exact routes, contractors, and budgets. While there was some civilian input, primarily in the form of citizen groups such as the DTT committee, planning in Larimer County largely conducted long-term projects that originated from within its government.

Weld County began its enterprise of trail construction a decade or so later than Larimer County and relied on the efforts of private charities to achieve its goals. Businesses native to the county had owners sympathetic to the idea of a trail network and identified the long-term legacy potential of such a project. Donations of land were forthcoming, but also donations of time and skill as represented by Fred Otis and the Kodak plant negotiations. Further, donations of money constituted most fundraising, although some engagement with entities outside of Weld also contributed to planning and development such as the NPS, after the establishment of the PRTB.

While both counties pursued individual schemes and methods, it was once the LWCoG commissioned a feasibility study in the early 1980s that the idea of a transregional system began. This initial seed then allowed the establishment of dedicated working groups that crossed political boundaries and opened channels of communication between long-established planning authorities. The concurrent efforts to designate the lower river as a National Heritage Area further promoted collaborative, transregional governance, as the PHA began working with communities from both counties. No other local recreation

facility or area had been managed this way until then. Lions Open Space and Missile Site Park both fell under Larimer and Weld County respectively. The management of these spaces was conducted by single offices, operating with a single budget, and single precedent. Arapaho National Forest operated above them all, with direction from a federal entity to guide management, yet this was still from one source of authority. Transregional management along the Cache la Poudre shifted ways of thinking in Northern Colorado, but also the state. Other large-scale projects had been undertaken but again fell under single authorities. The Platte River Greenway project succeeded in the late 1970s, thanks to concentrated authority in the City of Denver. The PRT had gone beyond and demonstrated what could be achieved with transregional planning, despite differing opinions, and resistance from ardent communities.

Other nationally celebrated projects also followed the trend observed on the Platte, such as the Davis Greenway project. Equally as impressive, it still only occurred under the purview of the City of Davis, California. Some projects have fallen closer to the trend demonstrated by the PRT, such as the Dahlgren Railroad trail system in Virginia which itself is transregional, and yet different to the PRT thanks to its use of a defunct railroad, owned by a single party. The PRT pioneered a shift from single-authority, top-down planning in Colorado and across the United States in the late twentieth century. The methods proposed by students at the University of Colorado Denver were applied in a distinct municipal environment. While these methods had been tested before, implementation across Weld and Larimer County, and the context-specific form of the transregional working groups were a welcome addition to the process of trail planning. As development continues to stress the power of individual counties and their respective identities, planners would be best educated to face emerging challenges by drawing from the PRT and its story. Transregional planning can be achieved if respect is paid to the individual working cultures of the regions that could become intertwined by a single, common feature.



Figure 3. Aerial Photograph of the Fort Collins Southeast Water Treatment Plant, ca. 1987. *Courtesy of the Ft. Collins Museum of Discovery, no. FC00148, Historic Maps Collection.* Digital copy available at <https://fchc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/hm/id/358/rec/142>.

Chapter 2: Establishment of Poudre River Trail Corridor Inc.

Beginning in 1997, Poudre River Trail Corridor Inc. (PRTC) combined some of the thinking already established by Weld and Larimer County. The newly minted non-profit was an evolution of the PRTB which had been founded in 1994 and chaired by Fred Otis. By 1998, Bob Frank was chair of the group and began to formalize operations. Acting as a non-profit, the foundation now manages the trail alongside Larimer and Weld County and is currently led by Barry Wilson. In the current day, PRTC continues the mission started some fifty years ago; raising funds for the trail, celebrating key volunteers, maintaining sections, and planning to complete the winding path that continues to stretch across northern Colorado. With an annual budget of under \$100,000, this is no small task—but how exactly did the organization begin? This chapter analyzes the first few decades of the PRTC, focusing on its operations and public engagement.

Following the frenzy of activity during the 1990s, the PRTC came about following the establishment of the Greenway Commission. This working group was founded by Greeley City council, who had identified the PRT as a goal beginning in 1991. Further support for the establishment of the PRTC came from suggestions raised in the trail master plan developed by BHA designs in 1995. These initiatives drew heavily from the feasibility study prepared in 1983 by the LWCoG. To capture the successes of PRTC, this chapter begins with a discussion of the non-profit's first board members, their roles, and initial goals.

Nancy Brigden, a member of the Greeley city council during the period, produced an article published in the *Greeley Tribune* in 1994. Within it, Brigden storied key moments leading to the creation of PRTC. Brigden begins her timeline in 1976, with the Greeley Centennial Commission, a group tasked with planning improvements to coincide with a celebration of Colorado's celebration of statehood. Brigden notes that the commission initially received positive responses from landowners in 1976, garnering verbal support for the project. Then, Brigden recognizes the feasibility studies produced in 1983 and published in 1984, before noting that during the following year, Greeley began to expand on this work and contribute to the campaign for the Wild and Scenic designation that would encompass the river. Following this, she notes the establishment of the Greenway Commission, and then a grant application to Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO). GOCO was established in 1992 at the state level, and still exists today. In essence, the entity uses

profits from the state's lottery system to fund recreational developments. According to the group's own website, over 5,600 projects have been supported by the organization, and over \$39,000,000 has been given to Weld County projects alone.³⁴ For local governments, this new pot of funding was granted on an application basis, and in 1993 GOCO members were treated to a presentation in Greeley concerning the history of the river.³⁵

Nancy Brigden met with members from GOCO at Missile Silo Park in 1994, a Cold War era missile site constructed in 1961 that has since been reinvented as a recreation space. The meeting was not private, with over a hundred supporters of the PRT attending to further convince GOCO officials of the importance of the project. There was also a malamute puppy in attendance named Sitka, who had been brought by Brenda Claman—a prospective volunteer from Greeley. Speaking to Chris Leding, GOCO manager, Brigden stated that “You’re standing at a site that already has been improved by lottery funds, and which will be a trailhead for the river trail. Of the land surrounding us, the most important are the rivers, for without them, we wouldn’t be here.”³⁶ GOCO was also considering several other projects at the time, including the Denver & Rio Grande-Roaring Forks Rail Corridor, Durango-Animas River Corridor and Pikes Peak Greenway. These other projects had similar motives; the development of natural areas for recreation purposes, however the projects lacked the storied history of the Cache la Poudre. Brigden in her statement alluded to the origin of western water law. Owing to a dispute between the communities that would later become Fort Collins and Greeley, the well-known adage of “first in use” is the basis of western water legislation, and essentially grants preferential rights to the users who have the oldest claims to water allocation. This precedent, first established in 1874 would be written into state law first and then replicated across the west. Currently, this legal doctrine is the basis for the Colorado River compact, which now dictates the allocation of Colorado River water for Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and California. The west’s biggest cities, and the lives of millions of citizens hinge on this legal framework.³⁷ Brigden was tactful in her employment of this heritage, and combined with the impressive turnout, helped procure the support of GOCO. In 1994, Laurie Mathews (then director of Colorado State Parks) and Will Shafroth (Executive Director of GOCO) penned a letter to Richard Quaco who acted as manager for Island Grove, a recreational site within Weld County and the first PRT-designated section of trail. Within it, the authors congratulated Quaco on the success of an application of funding to the tune of \$50,000.³⁸

³⁴ “Funded Projects,” Great Outdoors Colorado, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://goco.org/programs-projects/funded-projects>.

³⁵ Nancy Brigden, newspaper editorial “Poudre: Happy Trails to You,” folder “1990-1995”, PRTC.

³⁶ Mike Peters, Newspaper editorial “Trail backers woo GOCO,” folder “1996-1999”, PRTC.

³⁷ Water law is not the focus of this study, however ample resources exist that detail this history in more explicit terms. For a thorough review of western water, see Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*, rev. ed (Penguin Books, 1993).

³⁸ Richard Quaco to Will Shafroth and Laurie Mathews, Letter “Successful GOCO Application 1994,” folder “1990-1995” PRTC.

With Brigden and Quaco now funded, groundbreaking could begin in earnest. Within her editorial article, Brigden boasted:

Construction will be completed on the first mini-trail sections this summer. These short sections, at Island Grove and Windsor Lake, will serve as goalposts. They will be connected initially by side streets and county roads. Then, as other rights of way become available, the trail will be diverted to routes closer to the river. The entire corridor for the interim trail will be signed and identified as the Poudre River Trail³⁹

Early Organizational Structure

With funding, enthusiasm, and a growing appreciation for recreation, the PRTC began operations with a firm start—what was required however was a talented team of individuals to continue such progress. In 1997, a year after the formal founding of the PRTC, the group met for over a week in November and devised a plan, laid out in over fifty pages, with dedicated sections for everything from marketing to trail security. Each area of concern was tasked to a respective board member and given concrete deadlines to abide by. This section analyzes the document to highlight specific details of the PRTC's early operations.⁴⁰

Beginning on the 15th of November, Otis was tasked with developing a plan that would incorporate “coordinating and completing ‘special projects’ on the trail.” The document is sparse in its definition of what a special project might have been, however, details in the sub-tasks give us an idea of what these might have entailed. Specifically, there was the need to devise regulations for animal use of the trail, that being mainly for dogs and their walkers. Alongside this canine consideration was also the need to consider the role of the equestrian enthusiast. Equestrian use had been considered as early as Koirtyohann’s 1975 interpretive plan—she had outlined the need for a compacted dirt section just for equestrians. It is likely that Koirtyohann was aware of the needs of horses due to her attendance at CSU, an institution born out of land grant legislation and focused on agricultural education. Moreover, CSU and its equine school have long been considered leading parties nationally in the field. Horses typically benefit from not walking atop hard concrete, the impact of each hoof on such a hard surface often causing considerable stress on joints and tendons. This point had been reaffirmed in the feasibility study conducted by the University of Colorado Denver, alongside sections that described the need to preserve space for game shooting. This latter aspect was quietly dropped—although in 2005 signage would be added warning users about the presence of hunters on land adjacent to the trail—yet the consideration for horses has continued to be included in planning for the PRT. Discussions of mammals aside, Otis set about recruiting volunteers to form a subgroup that would deal with “special projects” once again demonstrating the inclination towards private donations of skill and time.

³⁹ Brigden, “Poudre: Happy Trails to You.”

⁴⁰ “Board Meeting Minutes,” November 15, 1997, folder “1996-1999” PRTC.

Brigden was given a task perhaps suited to her previous work securing the grant from GOCO. A goal was set to raise \$150,000 with the explicit purpose of expanding the trail by eight miles, developing a river crossing, and supporting the acquisition of additional land easements. To achieve this, Brigden recruited two volunteer solicitors and engaged with *Greeley Tribune* once more. Furthermore, Brigden developed a database of volunteers including names and contact details, penned a letter that would be printed for the purpose of dispersal in the community, and developed a script for volunteers in the field or on the phone so that volunteers could speak with clarity to potential donors. Brigden was also named in a similar document that stated the desire to raise a further \$350,000. This money would have been set aside for the following year and primarily funneled towards construction efforts.⁴¹ Further, it would have been used to begin building a pot of money for continued maintenance. Construction goals specifically detailed the completion of safe crossings at WCR 13 and Highway 257. WCR 13 is a small service road running north of Windsor. Highway 257 by comparison is a main artery running north to south via Windsor proper. Regardless, these construction goals were never met. The date of completion for raising the \$350,000 is absent from the plan, unlike the previous goal, no sub-tasks were devised or achieved.⁴²

Karen Scopel, working for the City of Greeley, had been involved in volunteering efforts prior to the formation of the PRTC as well as working for Greeley's Forestry Department and now found herself sitting on the grant committee.⁴³ This group from Greeley had been formed to manage the applications that were being sent to state and federal entities akin to GOCO. On November 13th of 1997, this group with Scopel at its head was tasked with applying for new grant funds, ensuring the completion of previously funded projects and submitting reports as needed. To achieve this goal, Scopel devised several sub-tasks. Firstly, the committee would begin to contact relevant stakeholders, outlining the PRTC's vision and securing their support. Next, Scopel would finalize a preliminary budget, and complete outstanding grant applications. These outstanding applications were for two sources of funding.

The first was a GOCO Legacy grant, which was typically used for educational purposes, fitting within the broader definition of community development. For Scopel, the argument was an easy one; developing the trail would allow for education on the history of water within the region, and as a recreational trail there would be tangible health benefits for those in Weld County.⁴⁴ Specifically, the GOCO Legacy grant would be used to develop sections around the Eastman Kodak plant. The second of these outstanding grants was an application to the County State Trails Grant, another immediately applicable source of funding. Administered by Colorado's Parks and Wildlife department, the money would also be used to support the completion of sections around the Kodak plant.

⁴¹ "Board Meeting Minutes," November 15, 1997, folder "1996-1999" PRTC.

⁴² "Board Meeting Minutes," November 15, 1997, folder "1996-1999" PRTC.

⁴³ Karen Scopel, oral history interview by George Moncaster, Greeley, 2024, transcript p. 1 (to be archived at FCMOD).

⁴⁴ "Board Meeting Minutes," November 15, 1997, folder "1996-1999" PRTC.

Scopel also pioneered the Memorial Miles program, which would allow private donors to purchase small improvements in memory of loved ones from the area. After partnering with a local hospice, donations came in that purchased memorial benches, trees, signage, and other minor improvements, often with a small fee that would then be contributed to the larger construction fund. This program would continue to operate for the next decade and beyond.⁴⁵

The final sub-tasks for Scopel included conversation with the latest enterprise undertaken by a prominent developer. Martin Lind, since donating land during the 1980s had established the Water Valley Company. The company continues to operate in Northern Colorado, particularly in Windsor, where the group owns several restaurants and local amenities. As an entity that also owns significant portions of land in the region, engagement with the Water Valley Company was required to secure further easements for the trail route. Beginning in 1997, Scopel and the PRTC would continue to converse back and forth with Lind, with Lind eventually sitting on the board after receiving a letter of recommendations drafted by the then mayor of Windsor Wayne Miller.⁴⁶

Mike Ketterling was another founding member of the PRTC, and his responsibilities fell mainly within already established expertise regarding construction. Working with Otis, Ketterling would secure the easements across the Tennyson property in Weld County, as well as the Edmundson trail easement. These tasks, while not construction related, were important first steps regarding trail development. Descriptions of these agreements were specifically crafted for grant purposes also, ensuring that future applications had a solid foundation. More explicitly related to construction was the designing of a bridge that would cross WCR 23. Beginning in 1997 and following through into 1998 Ketterling would profile the section of the river, design a bridge and then order it for installation.⁴⁷ Other projects that fell within Ketterling's purview included the recruitment of volunteers to survey contractor progress on other sections across the county, particularly the Kodak section. Concrete pouring would be completed by December 1997, and a program of work was drawn up to "clean up trail, shoulders, seed, add signage" at various trailheads between Windsor and Greeley.⁴⁸

Another series of tasks were drawn up for trail safety, although this responsibility fell to Dale Hall, a Vietnam veteran and later mayor pro tem of Greeley. As a public space, the trail fell within the purview of the local sheriff's department, and Hall was tasked with developing policies for trail etiquette to be enforced. Interestingly, the enforcement of such policy in Larimer County was designated to weekend police officers, meaning off duty personnel who had volunteered to walk the trail and keep a steady watch. By contrast, in Weld and under the direction of PRTC, there was to be less immediate supervision, with no off-duty personnel and instead a commitment from the sheriff's office to attend to issues swiftly.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Pam Lewis, newspaper clipping, "Memorial Miles Program Begins", October 24, 1996, folder "2000-2005" PRTC.

⁴⁶ "Board Meeting Minutes," November 15, 1997, folder "1996-1999" PRTC.

⁴⁷ "Board Meeting Minutes," November 15, 1997, folder "1996-1999" PRTC.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Bob Frank was tasked with developing a plan for maintenance, funded by the growing pot of money that Scopel had been generating through community engagement and the memorial program. The details of these plans were concerned with tree removal, gritting for snow during the winter, and overall damage repair which would become more apparent in coming years with the regular flooding of the river. Part of this maintenance would be carried out by contractors, such as the tree removal, however other less skill-based work was again parceled out to willing volunteers who could weed, trim, and pack soil with little extra training.⁵⁰ By 1999, two years after this meeting and the establishment of working goals, the trail was something to boast of.

An internal progress report noted the following degrees of completion:

- \$713,500 in assets (that being land, construction materials, and other tangible items)
- \$633,787 raised in community contributions and pledges
- Over \$678,000 secured in grant funding
- \$713,000 worth of in-kind donations, including site preparations, fencing, landscaping, and other professional services
- Further donations from the Hoshiko, Noffsinger and W. D. Farr estates for the construction of a bridge crossing on the Kodak property
- \$17,000 raised via the memorial miles program, with over forty individuals having been honored with enhancements across the trail
- A working body of over 400 volunteers with a reported two or three calls per day with more offers of work

The trail had a workforce behind it, now organized, with a set route and apparatus. As always, securing adequate funding remained a challenge for the PRTC. The final page of the internal memo notes a sharp increase in the cost of cement, which had skewed budgets established in 1996. Something had to be done.⁵¹

Marketing the Trail

During the initial 1997 meeting, a plan had been developed to establish a marketing group for the trail. Directed by Scopel, this group produced a report titled plainly *Advertising Campaign - The Poudre River Trail Corridor*. In bold font across the twenty-page document the authors emblazoned their names. Cathy Denker, Sheri Lobato, and Shelley Heier had devised a plan that would target all age groups, and appeal to specific user interests using local media to broadcast a message; the PRT needs more money to function for citizens in Northern Colorado, and part of that money had to come from citizens themselves. Each author was tasked with an age group. Denker would outline strategies for 25- to 35-year-olds, Lobato for 36- to 55-year-olds, and Heier for ages 56 and over. The authors begin by explaining:

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Poudre River Trail Status – Winter 1999," January 30, 1999, folder "1996-1999" PRTC.

Over the past few years the concept of building a trail along the Poudre River is becoming a reality. The wide range of activities the trail offers gives a very broad target audience. The awareness of this target audience is also quite low. The Poudre River Trail Corridor Board does have some current issues pending. For example, the property near the river needs to be attained before an increase in landowners becomes an obstacle. They also need to get more of the community involved in order to gain additional support from the local businesses. The Board is also very fortunate to have government funding that will match community support.⁵²

FACT:

PROBLEM:

SOLUTION:

The Poudre River flows 19 miles between Greeley and Windsor.

The Poudre River and its beautiful surroundings are currently inaccessible to Greeley, Windsor & Weld County residents.

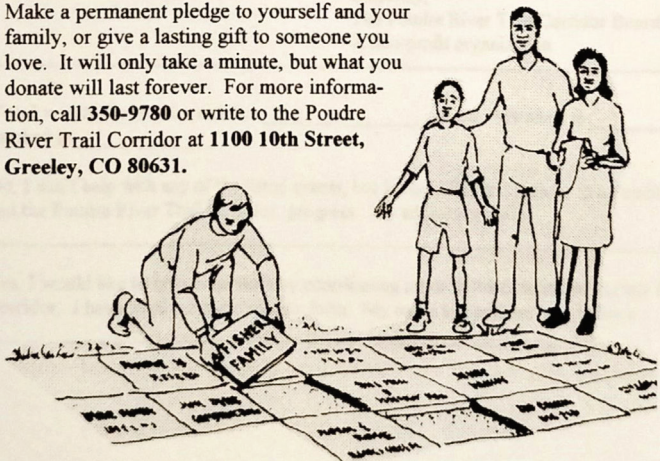
With your support we can enjoy ALL 19 miles of the Poudre River and its beautiful surroundings.

The Poudre River Trail Corridor is 2 miles,
let's make it 22 miles forever!

"Make Your Mark"
On the Poudre River Trail Corridor!

The Poudre River Trail Corridor has made it possible for you to have your name engraved in a brick that will become part of the memorial sidewalk of contributors to the trail.

Make a permanent pledge to yourself and your family, or give a lasting gift to someone you love. It will only take a minute, but what you donate will last forever. For more information, call 350-9780 or write to the Poudre River Trail Corridor at 1100 10th Street, Greeley, CO 80631.






Figure 4. "Make Your Mark" Advertisement for Poudre River Trail Corridor, ca. 1996. Courtesy of the Poudre River Trail Corridor, 1996-1990 Folder, History Bankers Box, Poudre River Trail Corridor Office, Windsor, CO.

⁵² Cathy Denker, Sheri Lobato, and Shelley Heier, "Advertising Campaign The Poudre River Trail Corridor 1996," folder "1996-1999", PRTC.

By winning the support of the community, the PRTC would have an easier time convincing landowners to sign easements and gaining donations from local businesses. The plan was to convey the message that with community support, the trail would be accessible to all and owned by all as a legacy project. The authors goals were to raise awareness in the target demographics by 25% and secure donations from 15% of those same target groups. To do this, the authors employed a variety of tactics, the first of which was a general print ad. This advertisement was printed in the *Greeley Tribune* and *Town and Country*, both local papers that had been covering the efforts of the PRTC and PRTB since their conception. With slogans such as “The Poudre River Trail is 2 miles, let’s make it 22 forever!” the adverts (shown below) implored readers to use the attached forms to submit donations in written cheque form, and become part of the growing volunteer network. The forms would then be processed by Scopel and her team. As per the rates for printing at the time, the team predicted that these newspaper adverts would cost somewhere in the region of \$3000.⁵³

Alongside the newspaper campaign, the team also planned to develop a visual advert to be played on local television networks. Scripts for these productions litter the internal communications of the marketing team led by Scopel. Specifically, the team encouraged deploying the advert on a “flighting” schedule. In essence, this meant running the advert heavily during a four-week period, before withdrawing it for four weeks and repeating the process over a year. As for the channels and broadcasters that would air the commercial, the group recommended ESPN, CNN, Lifetime and MTV. The justification being that with these broadcasters, the commercial could capture the attention of primarily younger target groups. The cost of this initiative would be \$4000. The nonprofit status of the PRTC meant that for each dollar the group spent, each broadcaster would match that contribution.⁵⁴

The final element of the advertising campaign would come in the form of a thirty-second radio piece. The broadcaster of choice in this area was K99.1FM who operated from Windsor, and broadcast on local frequencies. Again, the authors wagered that a radio advert would help appeal to younger demographics, perhaps guessing that youth enthusiasm for the trail would be harder to secure than older members of the community already invested in local politics and development. Reusing the slogan already pinned for the newspapers, over the next 18 months those tuned to K99.1FM would hear the following:

For 19 miles between Greeley and Windsor, the beautiful Poudre Riverwinds. But the river and its surroundings are, for the most part, inaccessible to Weld County Residents. You can help change that. With your financial support, the Poudre River Trail Corridor will become a reality. The Poudre River Trail Corridor is 2 miles for now... help make it 22 miles forever. To find out how... call 3550-978-...350-9780.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

These general appeals were laid out for the long term. However, the team had several other plans, using a limited time model to draw out support, and donations. One part of this included a special, time restricted promotion with a local aggregate firm called Arch Concrete. The plan was simple. Potential donors would be able to purchase individual bricks for \$15. Each brick would be inscribed with the name of the donor and would allow them to become a material part of the trail. Further, the authors recommended seeking the help of volunteers who already had skills bricklaying to offset the cost of construction, following the trend already established of relying on donations of skill to see the trail progress. This campaign came with specialty flyers, which were visible in the windows of local businesses, further emphasizing the cross-community support for the project. With regards to logistics on the part of Arch Concrete, the team suggested ordering bricks by the 1,000 which would in turn generate income around \$15,000. As the bricks themselves served a tangible purpose as paving, the cost was totally directed at the construction fund. Aside from paving itself, the bricks could also be used to construct other trail infrastructure such as benches, sidewalk edges and walls in appropriate locations. Memorial bricks were multipurpose in both target demographic, and practical use.⁵⁶

Another limited event strategy included an art show dubbed the “Mile of an Art Show.” The festival was pitched as a conference for local artists, who would be able to attend and showcase their works, as well as sell them to curious collectors. A date was proposed by the authors, and stipulations for attendance drawn up. Artists would rent twelve-foot spaces in which to pitch their wares at a cost of somewhere between \$50 and \$75. Further, each artist would donate a piece of their work for an auction, with these items sold over a two-day period, and all profits being forwarded to the PRTC. The actual location of the event would be on the completed sections of the trail itself, close to Island Grove Park, which had received the lion’s share of the successful GOCO bid. Statewide artist groups would be invited, as well as volunteers already registered in the PRTC database. In addition to this outreach, more flyers would appear in local shop windows. Concessions were provided by local businesses, further incentivizing their engagement.⁵⁷

In addition to these events, the document also planned a softball tournament. Held again at Island Grove, the event was strategically planned to fall outside the typical season so that teams and players would be able to attend freely. Charging just \$10 for tickets, the event would raise funds primarily through the sale of concessions, and equipment costs would be abated by a collaboration between PRTC and the Greeley Recreation Centre. Once more, the PRTC used radio advertisements to advertise the event, which was pitched as a fun day out, on the trail. Of course, volunteers manned a specially constructed booth from which they would disperse pamphlets and brochures, as well as providing information verbally about the goals of the trail project, and the benefits it had for the local community. By engaging local businesses, contractors, and softball teams, the marketing group was ensuring that the trail would be mentioned repeatedly, outside of formal venues, and on the lips of anyone and everyone in Weld County. Engagement with local businesses also established working relationships across a group of individuals with a variety of expertise that could be applied

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

to developing the trail hopefully free of charge. There would be many more Ketterling's and Otis's, each with their own task and timeline to work on. From large donations of land, physical materials, and legal advice to cakes, drinks, and art, the trail was drawing on every aspect of the local community to achieve its goals and serve those who had worked hard to raise funds.

Other events were planned too, although they were more traditional in their approach and relation to the use of the trail. Dubbed the "Fun Walk", this event was simply a stroll along the completed portion of the trail, followed by a wine tasting. Westlake Wine, Well and Spirits was noted as a potential partner on the event, again a local business that would benefit twofold by engaging with the plan. This event was advertised by flyer rather than radio or television. The marketing team planned to target older demographics who were less receptive to these forms of media. The authors argued that the event would be perfect for those who simply wanted to enjoy being outside, walking at a leisurely pace instead of racing around a softball pitch in the hot sun. Further, the authors emphasized that the slow pace of the walk would allow attendees to catch up with one another, perhaps tackling the emergent issue of elder loneliness. The appeal for donations was less aggressive, and attendees would simply be given a form if they wished to donate to the project after the event. Further, it was planned that the walk would take place in the early evening, after the height of the sun had receded, and temperatures cooled.⁵⁸

FACT:

PROBLEM:

SOLUTION:

The Beautiful Poudre River flows 19 miles between Greeley and Windsor.

The Poudre River and its beautiful surroundings are currently inaccessible to Greeley, Windsor, and Weld County residents.

With your support we can enjoy all 19 miles of the Poudre River Trail Corridor!

SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT

Have fun and support the **POUDRE RIVER TRAIL CORRIDOR** at the same time.

- **Saturday, August 17th, 1996**, there will be a softball tournament for the residents of Weld County.
- **Island Grove Park.**
- The cost is **\$10.00.**
- All proceeds go to the Poudre River Trail Corridor.
- To register, call or visit the Greeley Recreation Center.

SEE YOU THERE!

The Poudre River Trail Corridor

is 2 miles, let's make it 22 miles forever!



Figure 5. Advertisement for Poudre River Trail Corridor Softball Tournament, ca. 1996. Courtesy of the Poudre River Trail Corridor, 1996-1990 Folder, History Bankers Box, Poudre River Trail Corridor Office, Windsor, CO.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

These special events demonstrate a careful approach to community engagement from the marketing group. While the group had not specifically drawn-out themes suggested by the earlier feasibility studies and various masterplans, there was some overlap with regards to broader recreational uses, and a heavy overlap on stressing community ownership and involvement. Following this document, PRTC would go on to develop merchandise and other small items which could be sold at following events, and the model outlined in this document would see continued use with minor adaptations. Marketing on this community scale ensured that the project was well known not only by those who were involved with its planning and development, but also those who would eventually come to use it, and future users. Different methods of recreation, relevant to a variety of age groups demonstrated that the trail was a good idea for all, not just bird watchers or cyclists. This broad appeal shifted discussion from negative and potentially detrimental conversations over land rights to more apolitical discussions of various hobbies and sports. The marketing team was quite simply rather adept, but not perfect.

Trials and Tribulations: Challenges at Large

Naturally, not everything was cool evenings and summer wines. The PRTC would continue to acquire new sections of land, and pave further miles, each with their own challenges requiring an adaptive approach where possible, and the temporary closure of the trail where needed. As the trail moved into the new millennium, additional sources of funding became available, each with bespoke application process and requirements. The board changed too, as members left for other commitments although many remained in the local area and still engaged with the trail in less official capacities, becoming leading members of the volunteer community.

Beginning in 2001, Scopel redoubled her efforts to secure additional funding from GOCO and Colorado State Parks. PRTC had applied for \$200,000, which was granted with GOCO contributing \$125,000 and Colorado State Parks the following \$75,000. This money, however, required the submission of a renewed budget, adapted for updated construction estimates, maintenance costs, and bridge work. Further, the funding was conditional on the approval of the trail route by Weld County, and crucially state law which would become a sticking point. This money would be specifically used to further the trail between 71st Avenue and Island Grove, with Ketterling now as chair personally overseeing the construction once more. The PRTC set about devising a detailed budget, specifying a plethora of materials and labor. \$20,000 would be spent on grading work, with \$160,000 spent on concrete alone. A further \$20,000 was assigned to fencing, critical for upholding the conditions of easements with industrial landowners who risked otherwise causing harm to users, which again would be demonstrated in following years. Some of the contractors for this work were detailed in the budget itself, owing to existing agreements. Top Notch Fence Co. would receive \$7000

while Blue Ridge Concrete would accommodate most of the material needs for \$23,000. The budget would form part of a two-year plan ending in September 2002. The grant funds had been approved based on strict adherence to this two-year plan, and the timely submission of a report documenting its implementation.⁵⁹

Already there were issues. The plan itself admitted a funding shortfall of almost \$30,000 which was to be compensated with private donations, with the additional costs being driven by the construction of sheds, a sprinkler system for sections crossing public parks, as well as lighting across urban sections of the trail. Despite this, the previous fundraising success of the group meant that most concerns were dismissed, especially after the board was declared winner of the Community Pride category of Colorado Cares Volunteer Service Awards in 2001. A statewide entity responsible for acknowledging altruistic work, the award provided more publicity for the project, and an audience with county commissioners from across the state.⁶⁰

Recognizing the important milestones, and rapid change occurring, the PRTC group released a fact sheet that documented their existing achievements and justified their ambitious plans. By 2001 the project had successfully grown by the PRTC's estimation to nine miles under their purview, acquired \$1,398,400 in grant funding, \$2,620,125 in private donations (although the bulk of this figure is granted by estimates on the value of land donated) with a further \$228,960 acquired from local government.⁶¹ This achievement had not gone unnoticed, and the now critical mass of land donations prompted further engagement with important stakeholders. Documents beginning in 2002 detail several important donations, beginning with Lafarge West. The company was chiefly involved with the processing of aggregates much like other companies previously mentioned, although had not been active in the area for as long as others. Mary Harnett, land manager for the company, made a public statement that perhaps hints at the reason for a donation of a mile and a quarter of land west of 35th Avenue in Greeley. She stated that "Lafarge values its community partnerships and recognized its unique ability to join the many others who have worked so hard to make the trail project a reality." While only a line, the use of the word *join* suggests that the company understood that being associated with the trail was a positive piece of publicity, and by donating land the company could signal to locals their intent to support more than just their customers. Perhaps Lafarge had recognized how Kodak had long been engaged in the region and had been celebrated in 1998 for this. Further, a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the company headquarters, attended by the local press and officials might have provided the start of working relationships. City improvements always required aggregates.⁶²

Another rising development, the Poudre River Ranch Subdivision, also donated land. Owned by Ed and Susie Orr, the development was taking advantage of the growing housing market in Northern Colorado and doing well. The Orr's donated a stretch of land between 71st and 83rd Avenues, which ran through the proposed development. Ketterling spoke on the link between the proximity of housing to the trail, stating

⁵⁹ Summer Schoenberger, "GOCO Successful Application Letter 2001," folder "2000-2005", PRTC.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Poudre River Trail January 2001," folder "2000-2005", PRTC.

⁶² "Land Donation Extends Poudre River Trail (Lafarge)," folder "2000-2005", PRTC.

that “This portion of the trail is incredibly important” and that “As a result of the generosity of Ed and Susie Orr this section of the trail could be developed next to Greeley neighborhoods and help connect other sections of the trail corridor.”⁶³ Naturally, access to a trail does provide tangible benefits for citizens, whose health would be improved by access to nature and fresh air in a surprisingly industrial part of the watershed. Predictably, this benefit also helped in the sale of Poudre River Ranch housing units. An advertisement for Orr’s development produced in 2006 makes this clear. Alongside pictures of newly constructed homes, above small print detailing built-in washer and dryer units is the large block print that reads “Move-in Ready Patio Homes Along Poudre River Trail.”⁶⁴

Another group also donated land during this period, from their own estate, devoid of development interests. The Duran family had moved to Northern Colorado from Mexico in the late 1940s, having taken advantage of cheap land prices in a then predominantly rural landscape. Dan England, covering the donation for the *Greeley Tribune*, stated that the family hoped to escape the brutality of urban industrial work, and raise their children in a more natural, peaceful environment. Seven decades later, that same family gave back to the community and donated a parcel of undeveloped land to the PRTC for trail purposes. Unfortunately, there is little other documentation concerning this donation, although it is worth including alongside the Orr’s and Lafarge to demonstrate the wide variety of stakeholders engaged with the project.⁶⁵

Potentially the largest known donator (remembering that many cash donations of significant amounts were contributed anonymously) also approached the PRTC during this period. The Monfort Family Foundation was the brainchild of Warren Monfort, who had been a cattle rancher during the early 1930s primarily within Weld County. Monfort had made his fortune by developing the feedlot system, which is now used widely across the western United States and is known for simplifying the arduous task of feeding large cattle herds. Since then, Monfort Colorado Inc. has diversified into real estate development and investment in various fields including recreation, but primarily the restaurant industry and medical field, entertainment, aviation, and energy production. The original meat industry was sold to another later donator, ConAgra. In 2001 the foundation penned a letter to Scopel, having enclosed a cheque for \$200,000 having previously donated \$300,000 just a year before. As with GOCO and others, an application was required in which the PRTC argued that the money would be used to continue development of the PRT, something ConAgra described as “one of the most ambitious and cooperative undertakings in the region.” Perhaps recognizing the agricultural past of the Monfort family, ConAgra also noted that “In community barn-raising style this project has relied on the goodwill and common focus of community volunteers.”⁶⁶

⁶³ “Easement Donation Extends Poudre Trail (Orr),” folder “2000-2005”, PRTC.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Dan England, newspaper clipping “Family agrees to share land; city will finish Poudre Trail,” folder “2000-2005”, PRTC.

⁶⁶ Patty Penfield, Letter “Check from Monfort Family Foundation,” folder “2000-2005”, PRTC.

ConAgra donated \$10,000 in cash rather than land, following the method of choice that Monfort had established and that other companies opted to follow to support PRTC. Around this time, other projects began to stretch board members' attention, including Otis. Beginning in 2006, another, smaller trail limited to just Weld County was beginning to be developed. Dubbed the Great Western Trail, the project took advantage of the federal rails to trails program, which encouraged railroad companies to turn over defunct lines for recreational use. The logic was simple, as railroad lines often were solely owned by a single landowner and had a base level of infrastructure to build upon provided by the gravel embankments. Drawing further north, and through the communities of Severance and Eaton, the line owned by the Great Western Railway Company had been turned over to a group in which Otis worked. Altogether an easier process, the Great Western Trail would connect to the PRT at Greeley with many agreeing that it was simply an extension of the already expanding network of trails across the state. Other projects also began to draw in on Northern Colorado at this time, including the Colorado Trail which wove across the entire state, north to south, mainly through federal land. It should be made clear that the Colorado Trail is different from the PRT's unique municipal position for several reasons. Firstly, as mentioned, the land was primarily federally or state-owned and crossed largely unpopulated regions making easement and route planning significantly easier. Additionally, the surface of the trail was less developed, with an absence of smooth concrete for much of its surface. It would be easy to describe it as transregional—and technically it is—however as a state trail there was little of the negotiation between different governments and industries as has been seen with the PRT.⁶⁷

These other trail projects diverted attention, and when they did interact with the PRT, demanded a timely cooperation that often superseded immediate goals within Larimer and Weld County. State and federal developments were one thing, yet nature, the very thing the trail had been constructed to appreciate also posed a risk to the trail corridor. These dangers were realized when in 2009, a gas tank adjacent to the Poudre Learning Centre in Greeley detonated. The blast itself injured Derrek Majors, who had been working on the oil drilling site the tank was placed on. He would later sue Foster Trucking in 2011 for damages caused. The *Greeley Tribune* reported that the accident caused significant doubt among industrial stakeholders who had signed easement agreements with the PRTC. Thankfully, these doubts did not result in the withdrawal of stakeholders, however it did prompt one citizen to voice public commentary surrounding safety on the trail. Writing an opinion piece in the *Tribune* shortly after, concerned citizen Mark McCarthy did not hold back. He recounted how he was traveling along the trail at 83rd Avenue, alongside an electric fence that surrounded a nearby pasture. His dog Buddy, a 100-pound critter, made contact with the wire and was shocked but otherwise unharmed. McCarthy noted that his dog could just as easily have been a child on a bicycle, or an elderly pedestrian before adding that the placement of the fence seemed to “demonstrate a lack of judgment.” Speaking specifically to the oil tank explosion, he wrote:

⁶⁷ Newspaper clipping, “Towns work together to make trail a reality,” folder “2000-2005”, PRTC.

Now a nearby oil tank has exploded right across the road from the learning center. I am outraged that something much more dangerous than an electric wire was allowed to be built so close to the learning center, a yearly field-trip destination for hundreds of school children. It's bad enough gulping down the gasses and fumes spewing out of these oil tanks while I'm running in such a pristine, riparian wilderness area. (About a mile west, there is another tank built very close to the trail.) Every year, it seems, an oil tank explodes in Weld County. So why was this tank built perilously close to the road? I also found it incredibly ironic that an electric wire was listed as a possible cause. The Tribune printed a picture of the fiery scene without the image of the learning center as if attempting to veil the proximity of this explosion to the center. It's obvious the tank should be permanently shut down. And to whoever is responsible for the live wire next to the trail: do the right thing and take it down.⁶⁸

In his writing, McCarthy demonstrates several points. To him, the trail is supposed to be a site of wilderness, separate from the very industries whose land made the project possible. Furthermore, his commentary reveals a potential rift among the otherwise unified group of stakeholders and citizens who had cooperated on the trail's construction. Finally, he thought of the children, who had been a crucial element during the process of acquiring grant funds. Of course, McCarthy's writing is also a single example; within the sources provided by the PRTC as well as sources from local archives and state entities, his testimony appears to be the only one so critical of trail safety. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the resistance he voiced to the fundamental collaboration between industry and the PRTC. Perhaps he was unaware of the details surrounding the PRTC route and legal basis on which it had been acquired. Regardless, McCarthy's comments came and went without much further ado. The next set of challenges, however, would be different altogether.

By 2009, the PRTC had significantly streamlined the fundraising process, acquired grants, and celebrated with a nod to the region's traditional western history. Pitched as a "Golden Spike" ceremony, a final stretch between two complete sections originating in Windsor and Greeley was completed with much fanfare. The May 30th event was attended by the usual PRTC group as well as important state and county officials, including Greeley Community Developer Director Becky Safarik, who had been working closely with the group to ease collaboration between the city and trail project. Also in attendance was Greeley Mayor Ed Clark and Weld County Commissioner Sean Conway. Representatives from Windsor also attended the event, and watched as two teams of cyclists from each settlement began to race towards each other, meeting on the freshly laid slabs. Now, citizens could travel between the two municipalities along a trail they had built themselves, guided by the PRTC. This final connecting piece was on land that had been granted by Ray Tennyson, the Stevens Family and Marilyn Bunn. The easement agreements had been under way for the past few years, mainly guided by Otis. Between 59th Avenue and Rover Run Dog park, the trail would conglomerate from small individual pieces into something that rivalled the trail system in Larimer County and Fort Collins. Now at last, two long, continuous sections of trail existed on each side of the county line. There was still

⁶⁸ Mike McCarthy, newspaper clipping "Dangers close to Poudre Trail," folder "2000-2005", PRTC.

⁶⁹ Colin Lindenmayer, newspaper clipping "Celebration marks Poudre Trail completion," folder 2006-2010, PRTC.

much work to be done, however there was now a clear sense of physical direction for all involved. Work west from Weld, and east from Larimer. If you visit this site today, you'll find a rock inscribed with the following:

"EAST MEETS WEST! POUDBRE RIVER TRAIL CONNECTION MAY 30TH 2009."⁶⁹

Flooding the PRT

Beginning in June 2009, Northern Colorado began to receive a large amount of rainfall. The region typically presents hot, dry summers and cold, frozen winters, often with some heavy rain during the first weeks of spring. It is this pattern that has encouraged farmers since the earliest white settlements to construct a vast array of irrigation ditches, reservoirs and other infrastructure which now litter the landscape. It is common to witness a dust storm followed by torrential rain within a short period. As the adage goes, "If you don't like the weather in Colorado wait fifteen minutes." So, it was hardly surprising when rain began to fall in mid-June of that year, what was unexpected however was how long it would continue to rain for. Naturally, most of this rainfall eventually finds itself in the Cache la Poudre, with its legal allocations of water often prized possessions to be traded or debated over in a local water court. The river itself then deposits this liquid into the South Platte at the confluence just east of Greeley. Before this occurs, the water is confined to the smaller Cache la Poudre, with its limited capacity to absorb quick intense moments of precipitation. Flooding had occurred before, on a monumental scale in 1997.

During that event, most of Northern Colorado had been severely damaged. A stroll around the CSU campus in Fort Collins will reveal high tide markers, often above the head of a doorway marking the place where water finally stopped rising. Over thirty hours, 10-14.5 inches of rain had fallen. The damage to the campus was one thing, but footage and media captured during the flood demonstrate the community-wide effects. Five people lost their lives and were swept into the raging torrent, while power outages and lack of phone service limited the capabilities of local emergency services. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe line, which splits Fort Collins in two, was subject to bank erosion, culminating in a costly derailment. When all was said and done, over \$250,000,000 worth of damage had been sustained, and in response the city would use FEMA funding to develop a new set of drainage systems, as well as a model for flood awareness that is now used nationally.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ "On Top of the Game in Floodplain Management," FEMA, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.fema.gov/case-study/top-game-floodplain-management>.



Figure 6. Infrastructural trail materials collapsed in the Poudre River, ca. 2010. *Courtesy of the Poudre River Trail Corridor, Greeley Tribune Clipping titled "WATER, CONERNS RISE," 2006-2010 Folder, Poudre River Trail Corridor Office, Windsor, CO.*

It is safe to say that flooding was on the radar of most across Larimer and Weld County. It could be argued though, that most did not expect an event as severe as the 1997 flooding to occur again. Quite simply put, the general hunch was correct. The 1997 disaster remains one of the largest flood events in the region's history, however it had largely occurred in Fort Collins, and before much of the Weld trail had been constructed. By June, the river was rising once more, now across its entire length, which was partly parallel to the trail. Immediately, the natural floodplain began to be inundated, particularly between 59th and 71st Avenues, with the trail already submerged. Officials decried the moment. Jim Hall, an engineer with the Colorado Division of Water Resources went on the record to voice his predictions that the level would "change in the next week or two"⁷¹ Greeley had received 2.47 inches of rain, estimated at about an inch more than the average year. Rain continued to fall, leaving sections of the trail closed for several weeks. When the flood waters receded, volunteers scrambled to repair the damage. Luckily, this flood hadn't been devastating. Aside from a slew of debris, the physical slabs had remained largely untouched. By 2010, Greeley officials hesitated to commit to a

⁷¹ Dan England, newspaper clipping "Good news: Water receding Bad news: Poudre River Trail closed, onlookers told to stay away from area," folder "2006-2010", PRTC.

floodplain study, underwhelmed by the impacts. 2010 would bring another flood and the closure of the entire trail. This time, trees fell on the trail, and underpasses were submerged—the *Tribune* noted that at least four feet of standing water prevented walkers from traversing. Perhaps the local swimming team might have fared better. The damage this time was more severe, just one section near the Kodak property required most of the maintenance budget. With such a costly closure, the trail stalled once more. It had been completed, but now the bigger question of an intercounty connection was obscured behind a struggling budget and repeated maintenance requests. Flooding closures plagued the trail again in 2010, 2011, and 2014.⁷²

The first decades of the PRTC and its operations were much to be proud of. The group had realized part of the vision laid out by landscape students and planners fifty years ago. As expected, cultures across Northern Colorado had shifted in valuing different elements than they did in the past. Still, recreation as a broad category was recognized alongside ideas of legacy and tradition. These ideas, particularly the conception of the trail as a legacy project that would serve growing populations, intra-regional commuters, and future Coloradoans would be critical messaging to convey in the following decades and remain a prime motivator for those working to unite the Weld and Larimer sections.

⁷² Ibid.

Chapter 3:

The Formation of the Poudre Heritage Alliance

While the members of the PRTC and planners in Larimer considered the potential for a riverside trail during the closing stages of the 20th century, another transregional group based around the Cache la Poudre was emerging. This group engaged with the highest offices not only within each county and the state, but also the country as a whole. Known as the Poudre Heritage Alliance (PHA), the group was chiefly concerned with protecting the river as a resource. Not a resource in the traditional extractionist sense, but rather as a historical, cultural resource that would be developed in order to preserve opportunities for learning, fishing, bicycle commuting, rafting, camping, and of course walking. In their own words, the PHA “strives to promote a variety of historical and cultural opportunities, engage visitors and residents in the landscape, and inspire learning, preservation, recreation, and stewardship through various programming efforts.”⁷³ This section tracks the development of the PHA and is crucial in understanding another element of collaboration along the banks of the river.

The Cache la Poudre, as a river, has been used by humans since time immemorial. Bands of the Arapaho, Ute, and Cheyenne peoples collected in the river valley to meet, trade, and collect resources such as cattails and chokeberries.⁷⁴ As white settlers arrived in the area in the 1860s, land use began to change from seasonal use, by the tribes, to year-round by newly arrived settlers. Figures such as Benjamin Eaton began constructing irrigation ditches as the river entered the plains, in the area that would eventually become Windsor proper. Eaton’s original ditches now flow under many of the lakes within Windsor and along segments of the trail developed by Martin Lind and the Water Valley Company during the late 1980s and 1990s. As some might know, Eaton would eventually go on to become governor of Colorado in 1885, and have a settlement named in his honor.

⁷³ “Frequently Asked Questions.” Cache La Poudre River National Heritage Area, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://poudreheritage.org/frequently-asked-questions/>.

⁷⁴ For more information regarding Indigenous use of the river, see Lucy Burris’s *An Ethnohistory of the Cache La Poudre River National Heritage Area 1500-1880*.



Figure 7. Ralph L. Parshall assesses stream flow on an irrigation system at Colorado State University, ca. 1888-1992. Courtesy of Colorado State University Water Resources Archive, no. Wrlp01204108, Ralph L. Parshall Collection, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO. Digital copy available at <https://libguides.colostate.edu/waterhistory/parshall>.

Others took to the river and used it to inspire creation. Elwood Mead, director of the Bureau of Reclamation between 1924 and 1936, also traversed the river at times. His work during the early 20th century has helped shape the America of the modern age. During his tenure at the Bureau of Reclamation, Boulder Canyon dam would be constructed and later inspire The Highwaymen's single *The Highwayman* in which the group sings of being trapped within a tomb of concrete. Lyrical nods aside, the river also had more specific impacts on water use worldwide. Another figure, Ralph Parshall, taught at CSU in the 1920s, using easy access to the river to conduct experiments and test equipment. In addition to providing data for Bureau of Reclamation projects through collaboration with their lab in Denver, Parshall also pioneered what would become known as the Parshall flume: a simple piece of equipment that ensured a flow measurement could be taken regardless of the speed or depth of the channel being assessed. Fittingly the flume was directly of use to ditch companies in the immediate area surrounding Fort Collins, such as the Water Supply and Storage Company, who still operate the Grand Ditch, Jackson Ditch, and other projects to this day. Further, the flume would be adopted globally as a low-cost method for evaluating water flow thanks to its ubiquity.

Modern water rights were the result of various conflicts on the Cache la Poudre. Delph Carpenter who initially worked as an attorney for the Greeley-Poudre Irrigation District, later wrote the Colorado River Compact—the document that serves as a legal basis for water abstraction along the Colorado River. In recent years, its original wording has been highly contested as pressures on the resource continue to grow. Owing to the doctrine of prior appropriation, water rights are held if the abstractor ensures “beneficial use.” The idea of beneficial use, however, continues to be reformed as growing populations and development compete with agriculture and industry. These moments, amongst many others, were the driving force in the process undertaken to get the river recognized formally by Congress. This process, however, required multiple stages of appeal and collaboration, similar in some respects to the PRT, though with a vastly different end goal and ultimate authority.

With such a historic past, it was a logical progression for advocates to push for the Cache la Poudre’s preservation. In the face of a growing Northern Colorado, the same questions of legacy faced promoters of development on the river. As the process to acquire federal designation and recognition continued, this matter of development would become highly debated. How to preserve a river that was already under intense human use by the late 20th century? As outlined in “The Trouble with Wilderness,” a landmark article for the emergent field of environmental history, William Cronon wrote about the issue of separation. He argued that environmentalists strived for something unachievable: an environment that was absent of humans when humans were just as an important aspect of a landscape as other non-human elements.⁷⁵ To try and separate the two then, betrayed our role in the world, both historically and within the present.⁷⁶

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act had been written up in 1968, riding the wave of environmental consciousness that had raced across the nation in the closing stages of the decade. Legislators had written the bill to protect “certain selected rivers of the Nation, which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic recreation, geologic fish and wildlife, historic cultural or other similar values.”⁷⁷ Of course, this wording was deliberately vague as to what constituted those categories—local people with a deep understanding of their watershed would have to make the argument themselves. The Act provided some protection against development, specifically further impoundment measures such as dams, which already sprawled across most large flowing rivers in the state. Further, the lawmakers clarified different classifications of rivers, including categories for wild, scenic, and recreational. Wild was defined as “those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive.”⁷⁸ Scenic designations fell much into the same category, with the main difference being that they were accessible by road.

⁷⁵ William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton 1995), pp. 69-90.

⁷⁶ Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Public Law 90–542, approved October 2, 1968, *US Statutes at Large* 82 (1968): 906.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

After the law was passed in 1968, several rivers succeeded in gaining inaugural status. The Clearwater Middle Fork in Idaho, Eleven Point in Missouri and Feather River in California were successful in receiving designations as Wild and Scenic. The Cache la Poudre would have to wait seven more years until in 1975 there was another round of applications. When the time came the Cache la Poudre, alongside the Big Thompson, were penned for consideration. Importantly, the river had not yet been officially assigned designation prior to this, as its designation was instead simply recommended in the halls of Congress. Hank Brown, who had been engaging with preeminent trail planners in his native Northern Colorado, was a sponsor of the designation petition, alongside Roger Cisneros, Vincent Massari, and Regis Golf. Brown had a penchant for the outdoors, pursuing issues across the region on multiple levels. The wording of this 1975 bill however was limited. Besides the name of the river came the following caveat; instead of the entire river, the section for consideration would be “both forks from their sources to their confluence, thence the Cache la Poudre to the eastern boundary of Roosevelt National Forest.” meaning that of the river’s total length, only a fraction in the upper watershed would be deemed Wild and Scenic.⁷⁹

This recommendation, headed by Brown, passed with little trouble. The area outlined received little foot traffic due to the conditions required for a Wild and Scenic designation, and the protections against development had little immediate impact. There was no great stress of development that high into the mountains at the time. A decade later however, the slow rumble of internal migration had been spotted from the snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains. This time, Senator William Armstrong introduced S. 1819—built on the recommendations of the 1975 bill—which further stressed the need for protection. Introduced in November of 1985, the bill progressed slowly at first. By February, the United States Senate had requested commentary from the Office of Management and Budget, Department of Agriculture and the Interior. In the same month, the subcommittee on Public Lands and Reserved Water held a hearing to consult with officials regarding the designation process. By the end of March, the Department of the Interior and Agriculture had returned favorable commentary, and by October 1986 a final version of the bill was read, debated, and passed by Congress.⁸⁰

Dams and Development: Parallel Projects

The successful designation of the upper Cache la Poudre as Wild and Scenic was a huge victory. While the river had yet to be designated as a National Heritage Area, the successful passing of the 1986 law ensured that the upper section of the river would be protected from further impoundment. Sure enough, as housing developments sprang up around the Front Range, the state’s Water Resources and Power Development

⁷⁹ Wild and Scenic River Act Amendments of 1975, Public Law 93-621, approved January 3, 1975. *U.S. Statutes at Large* 88 (1975): 2093.

⁸⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Energy and Natural, *A bill to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate certain segments of the Cache la Poudre River in Colorado as a component of the National Wild and Scenic River System*, 99th Cong., 2nd sess, 1985, S. Rep 99-354, <https://www.congress.gov/bills/99th-congress/senate-bill/1819/all-actions>.

Authority had looked to the basin for the water needed to further encourage settlement. Just a year before the Act had passed, the power authority had spent some \$1,250,000 on a study of the river's resources. Gary Kimsey writing for *The Rocky Mountain Collegian* covered these developments in an op-ed published in September 1986. In it, he notes the success of the Wild and Scenic designation, although lamented that the limited wording of the act had left the lower Poudre vulnerable. According to Kimsey, the power authority continued to work around the designation, ultimately recommending a series of dams that would divert water into a new reservoir north of the mouth of the Poudre Canyon. Grappling with the reality that the Poudre could be dammed in one of its most scenic spots, Kimsey was understandably quite upset. He writes "Damming the Poudre is not like building a toy theatre that you can tear down once it no longer serves as a stage for your puppets. After that first glob of concrete is poured, you can't retrieve what you've lost: the beauty."⁸¹

Kimsey was conscious of the vastly diverse group of stakeholders on the river. Not just the development concerns, but also the needs of farmers and people already living in the immediate locale. As had been the case with the PRT project, the river was home to a wide variety of users, including farmers, fishermen, rafters, walkers, and breweries, which had a long heritage and presence in the state (with the likes of Molson Coors and Anheuser-Busch). Kimsey describes them in name, in a passage worth reproducing in its entirety:

[The] current efforts to dam the Poudre should be tossed into the trash can. My belief is only reaffirmed by much of what the study group claims we need in our lives: more and enhanced recreational activities; more water for the farmers; more water for development. We have plenty of flatwater recreational opportunities thanks to Horsetooth Reservoir. The Lower Poudre River already provides good fishing, hiking and whitewater. Why sacrifice a pristine area—the last free-flowing river on the Front Range—so we can have another Horsetooth, with banks crowded with A-frames and fishbait shops? The farmers here supported the construction of the Anheuser-Busch brewery, a huge water consumer. They also have been selling their water to a Denver suburb. Let the farmers drink dirt if they don't have any more consideration than this for such a precious commodity. I'm not an environmentalist bent on no-growth. But I am a realist, and I know' with careful planning, proper insight and artful diplomacy, development can occur without damming the Poudre. I stand to become a rich man if the Lower Poudre is turned into a reservoir. I'm a third generation Poudre Park resident, and I own land that will be beach front property. But what would I see from my beach? Unfortunately, a view of what was, and what should still have been for our children.⁸²

It is fascinating to observe that much like promoters of the trail, Kimsey was thinking of legacy when he penned his article. His explicit mention of children towards the end parallels the thinking of Mike Ketterling when he spoke to members of the press regarding the final stretches of trail construction between Windsor

⁸¹ Gary Kimsey, "Homeowners Protest Plan for Poudre Dams," *The Rocky Mountain Collegian*, September 29, 1986, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=RMC19860929-01.2.12&srpos=8&e=-----en-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxCO%7ctxTA-wild+and+scenic+poudre-----1986---0----->.

⁸² Ibid.

and Greeley. Likewise, Kimsey also recognized that to protect the river, industry couldn't be excluded, and instead had to be brought to the table. Another interesting aspect of Kimsey's testimony in *The Rocky Mountain Collegian* is his self-description as a third-generation Poudre Park resident. Again, much like the promoters and donors of the trail, Kimsey was a local with deep and personal connections to the landscape before him.

Ultimately, Kimsey wouldn't be a rich man. The project fell through as resistance mounted, demonstrating an early community that would resist development time and time again. Instead of a dam, Greeley's water filtration plant would sit just south of Ted's place, to process allocations that had been previously acquired by the city. It is interesting here to also note the parallels between Kimsey and McCarthy. Kimsey's commentary carries the theme of wilderness that was apparent in McCarthy's opinion piece. While not as explicit, Kimsey himself separates the river from human use despite the long-standing use of the river as a water source. Kimsey even mentions the Horsetooth reservoir, before distinguishing himself by stating that he himself is a "realist." Kimsey and McCarthy have differing opinions, that is clear. However, it is interesting to track some concurrent themes between their thinking, some thirty years apart.

Two years after the drama of the power authority and Kimsey, another party made plans for the river. In 1988, Fort Collins City Council issued resolution 88-105. The document provided funding for Shalkey Walker Associates (SWA) to create a study that would evaluate a possible designation of eight-point-five miles of the river as a National Recreation Area (NRA). An NRA designation would also require an act of Congress, much as the Wild and Scenic designation had, but crucially an NRA designation would have emphasized recreation and active use at frequent landings and trailheads. The existing sections of the trail along the river would form part of the NRA designation should it be successful. Although SWA's study could not be located by the author of this history, it is evident that its findings did not gain momentum, as the Cache la Poudre is not currently designated as an NRA.⁸³

With seventy-five miles now designated as Wild and Scenic, work continued to be done to manage what had already been recognized federally. In 1990, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and United States Forest Service (USFS) in collaboration with Larimer County, published a final management plan for the Wild and Scenic portion of the Cache la Poudre. This eighty-five-page document is worth mentioning for its large and dedicated sections to recreation, trails, and cultural resources.⁸⁴ Crucially, the plan stated that "No new dams or other diversion structures will be built within the Wild and Recreational River corridor" and that "A Poudre River Advisory Group will be organized by the Forest Service to improve communication and cooperation between management agencies, area residents and special interests."⁸⁵

⁸³ Fort Collins City Council, *Authorizing the City Manager to Enter into a Progressional Service Agreement with Shalkey Walker Associates Inc., To Conduct a Feasibility Study for the Designation of the Cache La Poudre River as a National Recreation Area*, Resolution 88-105, July 1988.

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, *Cache La Poudre Wild and Scenic River Final Management Plan*, (Colorado, 1990), p.12, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.rivers.gov/sites/rivers/files/documents/plans/cache-la-poudre-plan.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Just as the feasibility study published in 1984 on behalf of the LWCoG had recommended the formation of what would eventually become the PRTB, this document outlined the need for a specific organization to communicate interests on the river. Additionally, within the recreation subsection of the document, there was extensive planning for trails within the designated section. While most of these planned trails fell outside of the boundary of Fort Collins proper, there was an intention to “Locate a trail route for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding that generally parallels Highway 14 from east to west, and provides a potential link with Fort Collins, if possible. Locate most of this trail outside of the Recreational River corridor, and tie in with existing primitive roads, where use is compatible.”⁸⁶ It is clear from this that planners within the USFS and USDA were aware of the network already constructed in Fort Collins, much akin to the students at the University of Colorado, Denver who had recognized the value of existing trail infrastructure in their 1984 feasibility study. The rest of the document is largely concerned with the dedication of campsites, and other related infrastructure, which is unconnected to developments on trails downstream, yet these two excerpts are useful for considering the legislation that would follow.

Integration with Local Communities

It wouldn't be until 1995 that another attempt to grant a designation for the lower river would occur; this time it would be partly led by Senator Frank Murkowski who, at the time, was chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee within Congress. Murkowski was adding amendments to a bill that had originally been introduced by Brown earlier that year, and much of the original text remained Brown's own work. On December 15th, Murkowski submitted to the Senate the Cache la Poudre River National Water Heritage Area Act, which was received positively.⁸⁷ Within the act, Murkowski and the bill's authors outlined their mission:

The purpose of this Act is to designate the Cache La Poudre Water National Heritage Area within the Cache La Poudre River Basin and to provide for the interpretation, for the educational and inspirational benefit of present and future generations, of the unique and significant contributions to our national heritage of cultural and historical lands, waterways, and structures within the Area.⁸⁸

Once more the legacy aspect of the river had been recognized, now by those who had the power to ensure its protection on a national level. Crucially within the text of the document, there was the order to form a Cache la Poudre River National Water Heritage Commission. This group would be tasked with engaging the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, *Cache La Poudre River National Water Heritage Area Act: Report (to Accompany S. 342)*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, S. Rep. 104-188, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.congress.gov/104/crpt/srpt188/CRPT-104srpt188.pdf>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

appropriate parties to best administrate the newly designated area. Specifically, this meant developing a management plan that engaged local municipalities, state entities and federal sources of jurisdiction such as the Forest Service. One member would be a representative of the Secretary of the Interior, while another member would be from the Forest Service itself. Three members would be appointed by the governor of Colorado, then Roy Romer, to represent the state, CSU and Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District. Six members would represent local governments, with one member from Fort Collins, two from Larimer County, one member from Greeley, and two from Weld County. A further member would represent Loveland, with the final three representing the public as a broad category.

This commission, once assembled, would then be tasked further with the development of a management plan. Simply referred to as “the Plan” in the text of the bill, this document would ensure a budget that raised funds from the community to provide interpretation for the historical value of the river. This plan had to be conscious and complement local planning which meant the masterplans produced on county and city levels. As those plans contained provisions for the PRT, so too would the heritage area plan have to accommodate for this. Further, under a section titled, “Cultural Resources”, the document states that “IN GENERAL—The Commission shall assist Federal agencies, State agencies, political subdivisions of the State, and nonprofit organizations in the conservation and interpretation of cultural resources within the Area.”⁸⁹ For the purposes of this narrative, the specific mention of cooperation with non-profits is critical. This bill was enacted in late 1995, and the plan referred to had to be implemented before two years had passed. As such, with the PRTC receiving designation as a non-profit in 1996, the plan had to recognize existing trail development. Additionally, the bill asked that the plan “to the extent feasible, shall seek to coordinate the plans and present a unified interpretation plan for the Area,” further stressing the need for collaboration between a variety of groups across political boundaries.⁹⁰ This collaboration would occur with federal agencies; however, was not coordinated by them. The commission had been designed specifically to ensure that the area would not function like a national park, with oversight from Washington, but instead be managed by local people operating with federal approval. The federal government for its purpose would authorize the appropriation of some \$250,000 to ensure the commission could establish itself and build its own source of funding.

With these goals and purposes outlined, there was a final caveat; the commission would not be the entity to operate the area in a long-term scenario. Repeatedly throughout the document it is made clear that the commission should exist for roughly two years, some exceptions could be made to extend that period, however the commission was simply to design a framework and to see that plan implemented. At the 104th meeting of Congress, Public Law 104-323 passed. Finally, after several decades of various legislative efforts, the Cache la Poudre had successfully been designated as a corridor of national historic importance. Perhaps predictably, this was not the final designation. The wording of the bill referred to the river simply as a corridor of importance, rather than a National Heritage Area.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ An Act to Establish the Cache La Poudre Corridor, Public Law 104-323, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 110 (1996), 3887. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/senate-bill/342/text?overview=closed>

The bill would receive a series of revisions in 2001 and 2002, but these largely dealt with the technical aspects of how much land either side of the river would be designated, and how much additional funding the commission would receive. Essentially, legislative expansion of the trail had fallen victim to the tropes of the entity that had first given it life. During this period, the PHA was formed. Existing as a non-profit alongside the commission, the group also represented interests from across Northern Colorado and along the river itself. Crucial to note here is that the group was not recognized as a stakeholder in existing legislation. As per the 1996, 2001, and 2002 versions of the bill, management of the corridor was entirely in the hands of the commission that had been established. Despite this, the group as mentioned was in contact and accordance with local planning as well as the NPS and Forest Service, and now the PHA sought to influence that source of input.⁹² Beginning in 2001, the PHA began to enlist the support of NPS services to commission five separate studies of the river. The mechanism for the PHA's collaboration with the NPS existed as the Cooperative Ecosystem Study Unit Program (CESU). A national consortium, CESU included national agencies, tribal governments, universities, and other sites of research, all with the purpose of consolidating information and strategies to better manage public, historical, and natural spaces. The NPS had signed up for the program in 1999, and other projects included a project conducted by Montana State University and Yellowstone Park. Specifically, researchers investigated the feasibility of restoring native cutthroat trout and arctic grayling.⁹³ Funding schemes within CESU allowed the PHA to research the following subjects on the Poudre:

- An inventory of water-related resources.
- An analysis of evolution within the landscape.
- Formulation of management alternatives for the corridor.
- A series of interviews with long-time residents of Weld and Larimer Counties.
- And a study of the evolution of the water-delivery system across the river.

Clearly, the PHA was achieving several things with the completion of these studies. The group not only generated new, applicable research for organizations invested in the river, including the NPS (with whom the commission was required to collaborate), but also demonstrated an organized and effective form of management. Further, the PHA demonstrated a desire to actively learn and preserve aspects of the river.

In 2003, the group began to build on its findings within the study concerned with alternative management. A series of public meetings identified shared core values of the communities alongside the banks of the river. Many of these were the same values that initial trail donors had identified with and had used to justify the vast resources given in charity. Legacy first and foremost, with recognition of industry, history, heritage, and community. Those same stories that preface this chapter were used to illustrate each value. Building on this knowledge and local expertise, the PHA began to produce media, highlighting

⁹² "Poudre Heritage Alliance History," Cache la Poudre River National Heritage Area, May 2, 2023, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://poudreheritage.org/poudre-heritage-alliance-history/>.

⁹³ "CESU (U.S. National Park Service)," National Parks Service, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.nps.gov/nature/cesu.htm>.

certain sites along the trail in 2005. In addition to promotional videos and materials on water rights, the PHA emphasized Strauss Cabin (a historic building that had survived flooding), as well as sites in Greeley, Windsor, and Fort Collins.⁹⁴

These efforts hadn't gone unnoticed, and by 2009 another revision of the bill was being discussed in the halls of the Capitol. Now referred to as the Cache la Poudre River National Heritage Area, the bill was specifically crafted to transfer management from the commission to another entity. The bill also combined the findings of previous reports, synthesizing and clarifying information that had been acquired over the past decade. With the bill's passage, there was finally an agreement on the boundaries of the area. A budget had been agreed upon, and limitations outlined — the entity would not be allowed to purchase land with federal funds, instead requiring agreements akin to the easements acquired by the PRTC or raising funds itself. In the closing statements of the bill, the summary makes its enactment decidedly clear:

S. 128 would rename the Cache la Poudre River Corridor in Colorado as the Cache La Poudre National Heritage Area (NHA). The bill also would designate the Poudre Heritage Alliance, a local nonprofit organization, as the new management entity for the NHA and would authorize additional funding for the alliance or other eligible entities⁹⁵

Thus, the bill passed and the Cache NHA was finally established in its modern form, with the PHA becoming the entity to manage it. Since 2009 the PHA (now referred to as the Cache NHA) has continued to develop resources along the river, periodically releasing masterplans and interpretive guidance that local entities use to enhance the experience of those along the river. The Cache NHA also continues to fund studies of the river and its resources, while developing a physical presence through signage. This text itself was funded in part by the Cache NHA. These activities have seen engagement with all sorts of local stakeholders, from the cities that the Poudre weaves through, the counties designating broad-reaching land policy, and other non-profits invested in water, and sources of recreation. Sources of recreation, like a transregional trail that traces the river through its various sections strewn across the region. Most recently, Senators John Hickenlooper and Michael Bennet introduced legislation to extend the designation of the NHA, which had been set to expire in 2024. Instead, the Cache NHA will continue to be recognized as a heritage area until at least 2036.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ "Poudre Heritage Alliance History," Cache la Poudre River National Heritage Area, May 2, 2023, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://poudreheritage.org/poudre-heritage-alliance-history/>.

⁹⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, *Cache La Poudre River Heritage Area: Report (to Accompany S. 128)*, 110th Cong., 2nd sess., 2008, S. Rep. 110-285, p. 8.

⁹⁶ U.S. Senator Hickenlooper for Colorado, "Hickenlooper, Bennet Introduce Bill to Reauthorize Colorado's Three National Heritage Areas: Cache La Poudre, Sangre de Cristo, and South Park | Senator John Hickenlooper," March 2, 2022, accessed November 10, 2024, https://www.hickenlooper.senate.gov/press_releases/hickenlooper-bennet-introduce-bill-to-reauthorize-colorados-three-national-heritage-areas-cache-la-poudre-sangre-de-cristo-and-south-park/.

Non-Profit Communication: Altruism Across Interests

The PHA was constructing signage on the Poudre as early as 2003, with other improvements being implemented over time. Naturally, some of the very same sites that had been connected by the PRT in the years before the PHA also were significant to PHA interpreters. These two groups, who must have known of each other, likely began conversing formally during this period. Karen Scopel was a founding PHA board member, and continues to work for the group. Of course, the city of Fort Collins was deeply invested also, and sections of the PRT here were some of the first to receive PHA signage. For instance, a city document signed in 2005 is titled “AGREEMENT FOR THE PLACEMENT OF INTERPRETIVE SIGNS” and contains over twenty pages of mapping and annotation.

The interpretative signs were to be designed by the PHA with input from the city. Fort Collins was able to influence the interpretation elements, however stated openly their agreement with the values of the PHA. The signs would also become the property of the city once installed, taking responsibility for maintenance, instead of relying on volunteers as the early PRTC had done. In the event of substantial damage, the PHA would return the sign and if possible, restore it before returning ownership to the city. While small details, they are useful to consider when compared to the organization of the early PRTC, which had relied on volunteers and fundraising to support early maintenance. This maintenance of the PRT would eventually be handed over to local cities around 2011, potentially following the model outlined by the PHA.⁹⁷

Collaborations such as the 2005 agreement continued, with joint grant endorsements becoming a regular staple. In a document penned in July of 2019, then-PRTC trail manager Robert Hinderaker wrote to Fletcher Jacobs, who worked as the State Trails Program Manager. In it, Hinderaker states that “The Poudre River Trail Corridor Inc. is writing this letter in support of the Poudre Heritage Alliance’s grant request.”⁹⁸ The grant in question would further fund signage along the trail, with Hinderaker adding: “The PRTC has benefited from our close alliance with the PHA by providing community members with more than just a trail, but to a historically rich river corridor to explore and appreciate.”⁹⁹ It was clear that much like Fort Collins in 2005, the PRTC saw the PHA as a kindred spirit. The letter goes on to end with the following:

When we share the story of the construction of the Poudre Trail in Weld County we start with how the Cache la Poudre River has shaped our landscape and our history. We share the importance of community partnerships and the desire of members of our community to participate in healthy outdoor activities. We can manage the trail, but we look to the Poudre Heritage Alliance to promote the historical and cultural opportunities, engage people in the river corridor and inspire learning, preservation, and stewardship. We are hopeful your organization will help support this important mission.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Darin Attebery, governmental agreement, “AGREEMENT FOR PLACEMENT OF INTERPRETIVE SIGNS 2005,” PRTB Digital File System PHA Folder, PRTC.

⁹⁸ Bob Hinderaker, grant support letter, “RE: Colorado the Beautiful 2019 Planning Grant,” PRTB Digital File System PHA Folder, PRTC.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Then, following the grant support document, there appears to have been an agreement that signified coordinated sign placement. While the document remains unsigned, the proposal was at least considered enough to warrant specific GPS coordinates for the signs to be placed. Several of these signs exist today. The document largely follows the format of the Fort Collins agreement, which granted it interpretive authority over signage. There is one small change that states the agreement is valid for ninety-nine years, and that it could be canceled within two weeks' notice. Hinderaker's name was on the document at the very bottom. These signs included three signs across Windsor at Eastman Park, Whitney Ditch and B.H Eaton Ditch. Four more were proposed in Greeley at Jones Ditch, the Poudre Learning Center, Greeley Ditch #3, and Island Grove.¹⁰¹

In 2022, Hinderaker wrote to PRTC veteran Scopel, who was now working in Greeley within the Natural Areas and Trails Department. In it, Hinderaker welcomed the support of Greeley for a new signage initiative at Island Grove Park. He noted that the signs will further enhance the corridor, also adding that the PRTC “strongly urge the Poudre Heritage Alliance to support this opportunity to add trailhead signage for the benefit of the thousands of trail users that rely on the Poudre Trail to connect to nature found along the river.”¹⁰² The two organizations relied on each other to push individual agendas, operating with the same broad goal, and achieving that goal in slightly different ways. As the PRTC and PHA took over the main brunt of interpretation and recreation across the entire river, these two counties and their respective municipalities would have to recalibrate their roles, resources and objectives. The trail remained unconnected between the two counties, and there was now a growing demand to see the corridor united, transregionally.

The establishment of the PHA shares several common elements with the founding of the PRTC. Both groups existed as non-profits and were invested in preserving the river beyond its traditional extractive use. Both groups required collaboration and input from both federal and state agencies and required clear lines of communication to ensure pursuit of self-declared objectives. Members of both groups considered legacy as a motivator for their actions, and unsurprisingly individuals invested in one group often became involved in the other. It is important to remember the differences between these two entities, however useful to demonstrate the similar methods and techniques used to draw a wide variety of stakeholders into conversations regarding the cultural potential of the Cache la Poudre. In many ways, these two groups parallel the relationship between both Weld and Larimer County, both counties recognizing the potential of the river.

¹⁰¹ Kathleen Benedict, governmental agreement, “AGREEMENT FOR PLACEMENT OF INTERPRETIVE SIGNS,” PHA Digital File System, PRTC.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Chapter 4:

Larimer for Tomorrow: Contemporary Development Around Fort Collins

Larimer County might look, smell, and sound different from Weld County, but it hasn't always been this way. Agriculture had, much like in Weld, given the county its original industry, more permanent than the fur trappers that skulked the waterways. CSU, located in Fort Collins, was originally founded as the Colorado Agricultural College in 1870, and to this day retains its emphasis on agriculture. A stroll through campus will reveal several buildings associated with agricultural science, many of them new and well-funded. Additionally, students can purchase fresh beef and pork from an on-campus butcher, the meat originating from farm holdings that the university operates. Furthermore, the CSU campus in Denver also shares these agricultural roots, allowing members of the public to witness developments in equine care as they occur. One would also be hard-pressed not to notice the CSU heraldry in the form of a ram at many local livestock events. The National Western Stock Show, the biggest rodeo in the Intermountain West, also receives support from the institution. Though agriculture has left a mark on both Larimer and Weld counties, the interpretation of that heritage has differed significantly.

According to US census data, Larimer County was home to 359,000 people in 2020.¹⁰³ While the number is larger than Weld's, this growth has been sustained rather than rapidly increasing in the past decade. Employers such as Hewlett Packard set up locations in Fort Collins during the late 1970s, attracting skilled labor to the area, and bringing the emerging computer industry to a small corner of Colorado. Other businesses got their start locally, like the Fort Collins National Cash Register plant, and its opening in 1979. Tasked with the production of circuit boards for crunching pennies on the dime, the plant employed over 150 people by 1981. Several malls were built beginning in the early 1980s. University, Foothills Fashion, and The Square began servicing shoppers in Fort Collins and adjacent areas, with no doubt deals on puffed

¹⁰³ United State Census Bureau, "Larimer County, Colorado," 2020, accessed November 10, 2024, https://data.census.gov/profile/Larimer_County,_Colorado?g=050XX00US08069.

shoulder jackets and big hairstyles. Of course, it would be unjust to not note the establishment of the very same brewery that received mention in defense of the river. In 1988, Anheuser-Busch opened its brewery northeast of Fort Collins and began producing beer for national markets using water from the Front Range.¹⁰⁴

The same elements existed on both sides of the county line, although Larimer County could be deemed somewhat more cosmopolitan. Regardless, each county had national companies present, a prominent university, and shared a farming history. Both had successfully constructed trail systems by the early 2000s and continued to make plans for the future and expected growth. This section discusses recent developments in Larimer County, documenting the evolution of trail building techniques.

County Level Planning

In 1997, the Larimer County Planning Commission adopted the Larimer County Master Plan. PLUS Consultants worked in collaboration with several working groups put together by the county, including an agricultural task force and an environmental advisory board. Over twenty names graced the two pages of contributors at the front of the document, demonstrating the breadth of areas with which the plan was concerned. Specifically, the plan was to establish a “long-range framework for decision-making for the unincorporated area of the County.”¹⁰⁵ This is important to establish, as it leaves Fort Collins to its own devices, responsible for its own decisions regarding zoning and recreational use. In between passages describing “fair-use principles and public participation,” the plan set out some very general ideas for trails in unincorporated areas. Specifically, one goal of the plan reaffirmed that “Open lands shall continue to be a defining feature of the landscape of Larimer County” and trails would be needed to access such open lands.¹⁰⁶ The Larimer County Open Lands Program, housed within the Parks Department would be tasked with providing “significant open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, parks and trails for present and future generations.”¹⁰⁷ Noting the language regarding future generations, it is possible that planners were recognizing the importance of legacy, just as other entities in the county had before. The DTT committee of the 1960s seemed to have lived on in some forms through county legislation later in the 20th century.

The rest of the plan continues in broad strokes but does make mention of the use of existing trail networks such as the PRT. It appeared that planners in the county office seemed content to delegate the finer details of trail planning to the main entity in the region. Fort Collins, having originally built the most complete sections of the PRT, would remain the chief arbiter of its continued development. Thus, in 2008, the city produced a Parks and Recreation Policy Plan that would deal with the PRT in more extensive detail.

¹⁰⁴ Fort Collins History Connection, “Fort Collins Time Line,” 2009, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://history.fcgov.com/timeline/>.

¹⁰⁵ Larimer County Planning Department, “Larimer County Master Plan,” November 19, 1997, p. 1, accessed November 10, 2024, https://www.larimer.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2017/larimer_county_master_plan_2.pdf.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

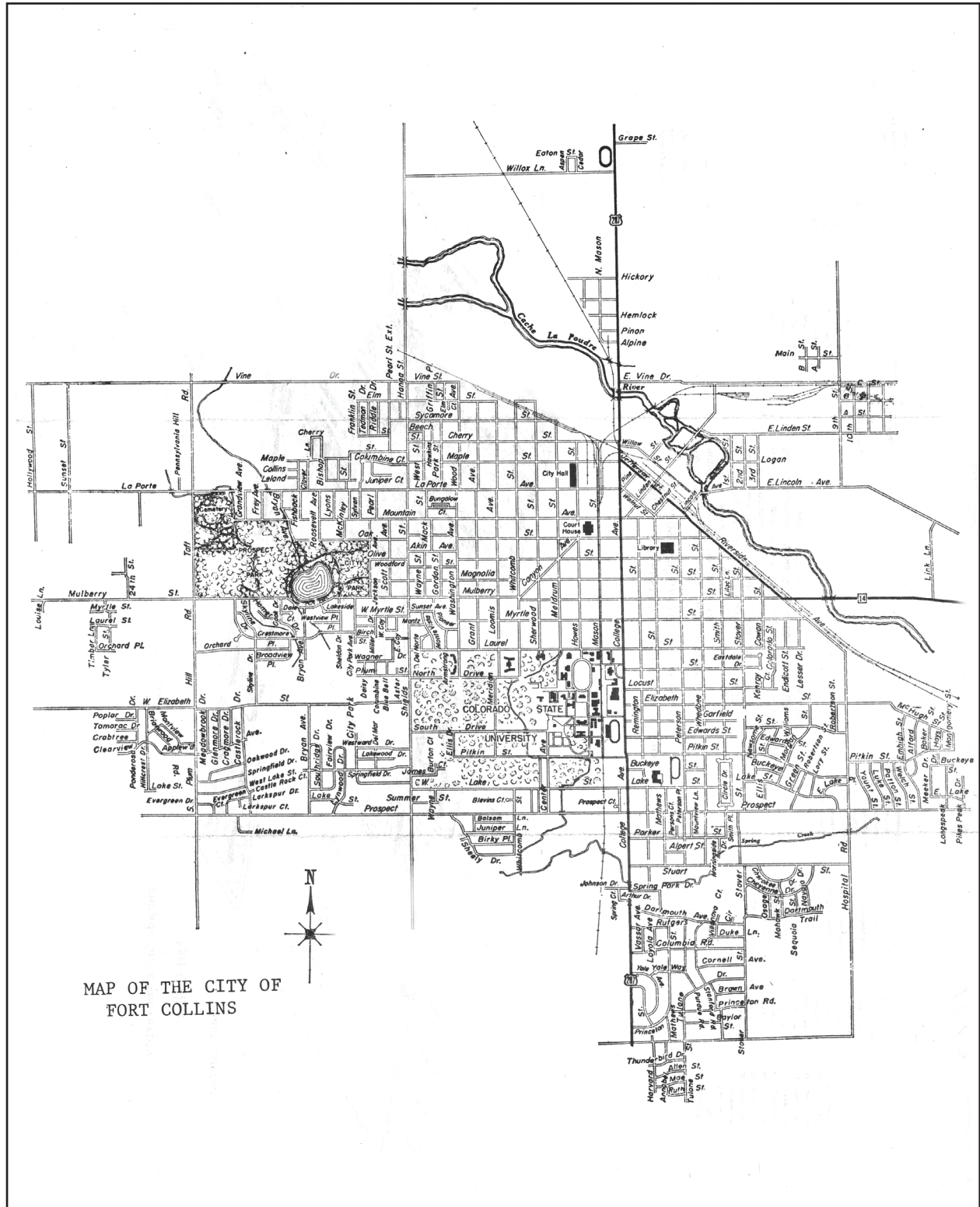


Figure 8. Map of Fort Collins and Colorado State University Main Campus, ca. 1975. Courtesy Ft. Collins Museum of Discovery, no. FC00124, Historic Maps Collection. Digital copy available at <https://fchc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/hm/id/957/rec/40>.

Craig Foreman, having worked extensively within the department for almost two decades, was a co-author on the plan, and then acted as Manager for the Park Planning and Development. Once again enlisting the support of a group of consultants, the plan identified the biggest challenges to the city as “increasing costs to operate and maintain the System” and that “it is imperative that Fort Collins take into consideration the additional costs associated with building-out and operating planned future parks, trails, and indoor recreation facilities.”¹⁰⁸ Further, the authors identified that “Long term sustainability is dependent on prioritized decision making, identification of core services, and maximized use of resources.”¹⁰⁹ Legacy once more was emerging as a theme, providing for future Coloradoans much in the way that planners in Windsor would later recognize the pressure of growing populations.

Crucially, the plan also considered community input to the extent that an extensive survey was conducted the year prior to evaluate top concerns. This survey included meeting with a variety of community groups, nonprofits, and municipal bodies within Fort Collins. Further the consultants responsible, GreenPlay LLC, also conducted mail surveys to gather the opinions of associated civilians within the city. The plan also pre-empted the matter of funding, advising generally that “The City’s General Fund is recommended as the continued source for operation and maintenance funds” in addition to the use of Conservation Trust Funds which originated from lottery earnings in the region. These lottery funds would also finance future trail development, including sections of the PRT. With regards to trails specifically, the plan noted that there was significant room for improvement to service growing neighborhoods.

As with other plans produced across Northern Colorado, the Fort Collins plan acknowledged existing progress with the development of recreational opportunities, boasting that by 2008 “Fort Collins now has 45 developed parks, 61 miles of trails (including Natural Area soft surface trails) and 11 recreation facilities.”¹¹⁰ Recognizing the growth of population in the region, planners stated that “the community has grown significantly in recent years, and the park and recreation system has done well to expand service.”¹¹¹ The Parks and Recreation department recognized existing relationships with other management entities, primarily the Poudre School District and CSU. CSU, with its large and extensive campus gym, had the facilities to provide swimming, saunas, and boxing courts amongst other amenities.

The authors compared Fort Collins to other areas. Rather than name other settlements in Colorado, however, planners compared the city’s demographics to state statistics and national averages. This choice continues the trend already established by the Parks and Recreation department in the 20th century under H.R. Phillips, mainly a centralized plan that eschewed regional models for something more integrated with state and federal habits. These comparisons also continued in the plan, specifically regarding household

¹⁰⁸ City of Fort Collins, “Parks and Recreation Policy Plan,” October, 2008, p. 6, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.fcgov.com/parkplanning/pdf/policy-plan.pdf?1528733790>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

income, racial makeup of the city, and home ownership. Interestingly, the plan also had consideration for the health statistics of citizens, arguing that a survey of health would best identify which recreational activities could benefit a holistic experience of the city. These demographics were paired with the findings from community surveys, which granted a more specific focus for improvements. Alongside developing further amenities at existing parks such as Edora and Lee Martinez, respondents stated their desire to “create recreation opportunities regarding the Poudre River” and that the city should “increase the connections of bike lanes and trails.”¹¹²

To this end, the plan noted that both Spring Creek and the PRT were the most used corridors within the city, citing high footfall and positive survey responses. Just as will be seen with plans produced in Weld County, the PRT did not receive special attention, instead being listed as an asset alongside less substantial sections of the trail network. Yet, in the closing pages of the document, there is a pledge to see the PRT completed, specifically the eastern sections that would cross the I-25. The trail by 2008 ran from a trailhead on County Road 54G, all along the bank of the river until it reached a terminal trailhead on S County Road 9. The proposed route would continue from County Road 9, through the East Community neighborhood, and under the highway just south of a state trooper station. This would put the trail as close to the county line as it ever had been and remove the largest barrier to connection between the two existing segments.

The plan simply stated that a medium priority was to complete the PRT, at an estimated cost of \$2,000,000. At \$5000 expected per mile, the funding would come from Conservation Trust Grants, while maintenance on new sections would be covered by the city’s General Fund. Interestingly, the definition of this task as a medium priority meant that this extension was to be completed between 2008 and 2013. As of writing, the section has recently been completed, and now ties the PRT together from Arapahoe Bend to the underpass beneath the I-25. Following the 2008 plan, both Fort Collins, as well as Timnath, which lay on the east side of the I-25, within Larimer County and on the path of the PRT, continued to produce recommendations for future management.

Challenges for the Long-Term: Stalled Progress

Between 2008 and 2013, the proposed expansion under I-25 and towards Timnath remained just that, a proposal. No construction work had occurred that required trail maps related to the PRT to be updated. Clearly, something had gone awry, and planners attempted to understand exactly what had occurred. This exercise culminated in Timnath producing a more specific document in 2013, referred to as the Paved Recreational Trail Masterplan. In summary, it documented the history of the PRT, stating that “The land along the Poudre River and Spring Creek was rural with agricultural uses when the early easements were

¹¹² Ibid.

PERSPECTIVE E: GRASP® ACCESS TO RECREATION TRAIL NETWORK

For this perspective, trails that offer significant recreational value, including amenities such as high scenic value, proximity to natural areas, and such things as benches, interpretive signs, etc. are scored at a higher value. Trails were scored with 1, 2, or 3 points depending upon how well they met the expectations for their intended purpose. This is because these types of trails function much like a park with a combination of active and passive components, and because of the high value that is typically placed on trails in the needs assessment process. The score for a given length of trail was assigned to a 1/3 mile buffer paralleling the trail along both sides. This perspective shows that a network of trails is taking shape in Fort Collins on a grid of approximately every two to three miles.

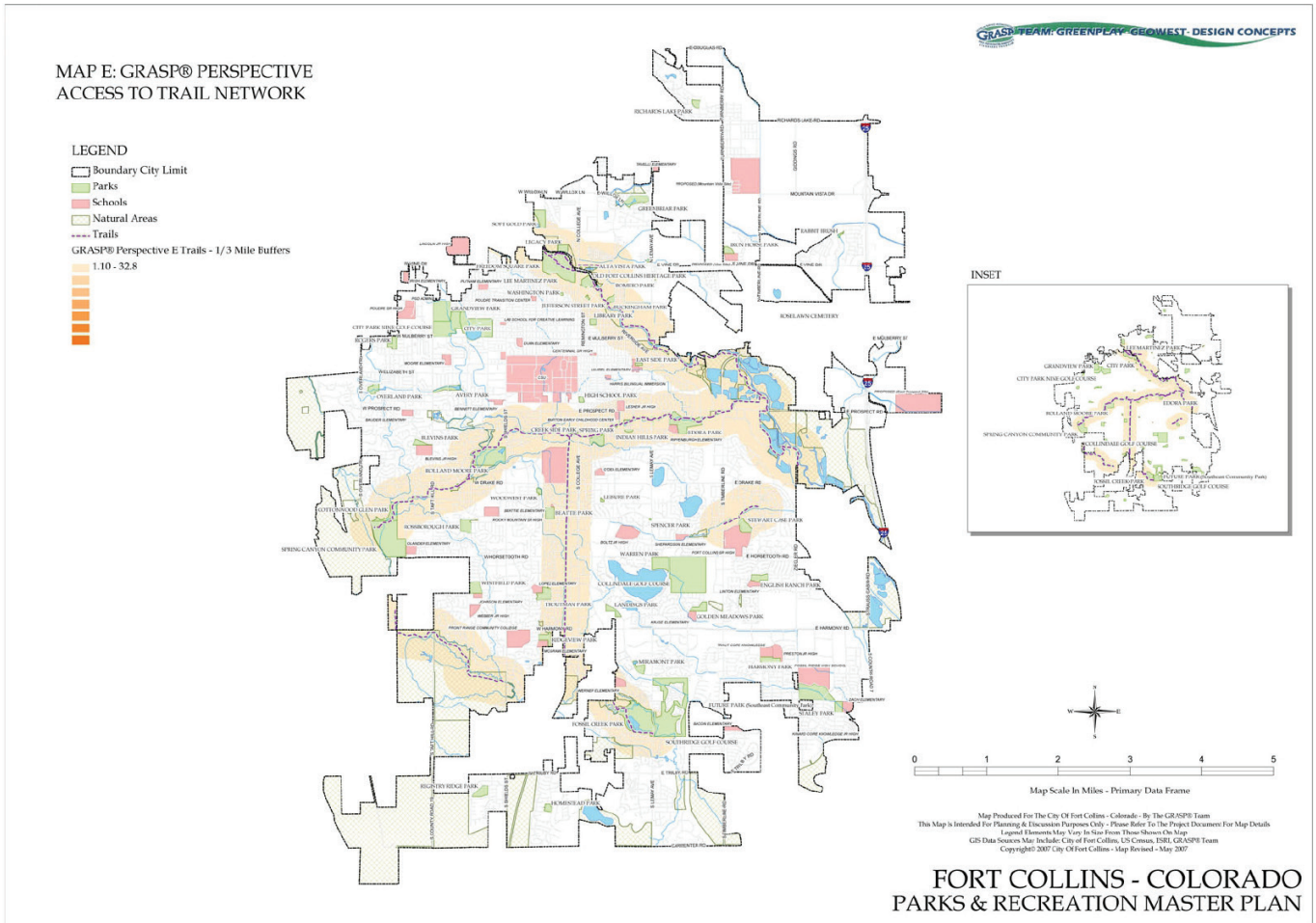


Figure 9. Fort Collins Parks & Recreation Policy Plan Master Plan Map, ca. 2008. Courtesy of the City of Fort Collins, pg.61, "Parks and Recreation Policy Plan." Digital copy of Master Plan available at <https://www.fcgov.com/parkplanning/pdf/policy-plan.pdf?1528733790>.

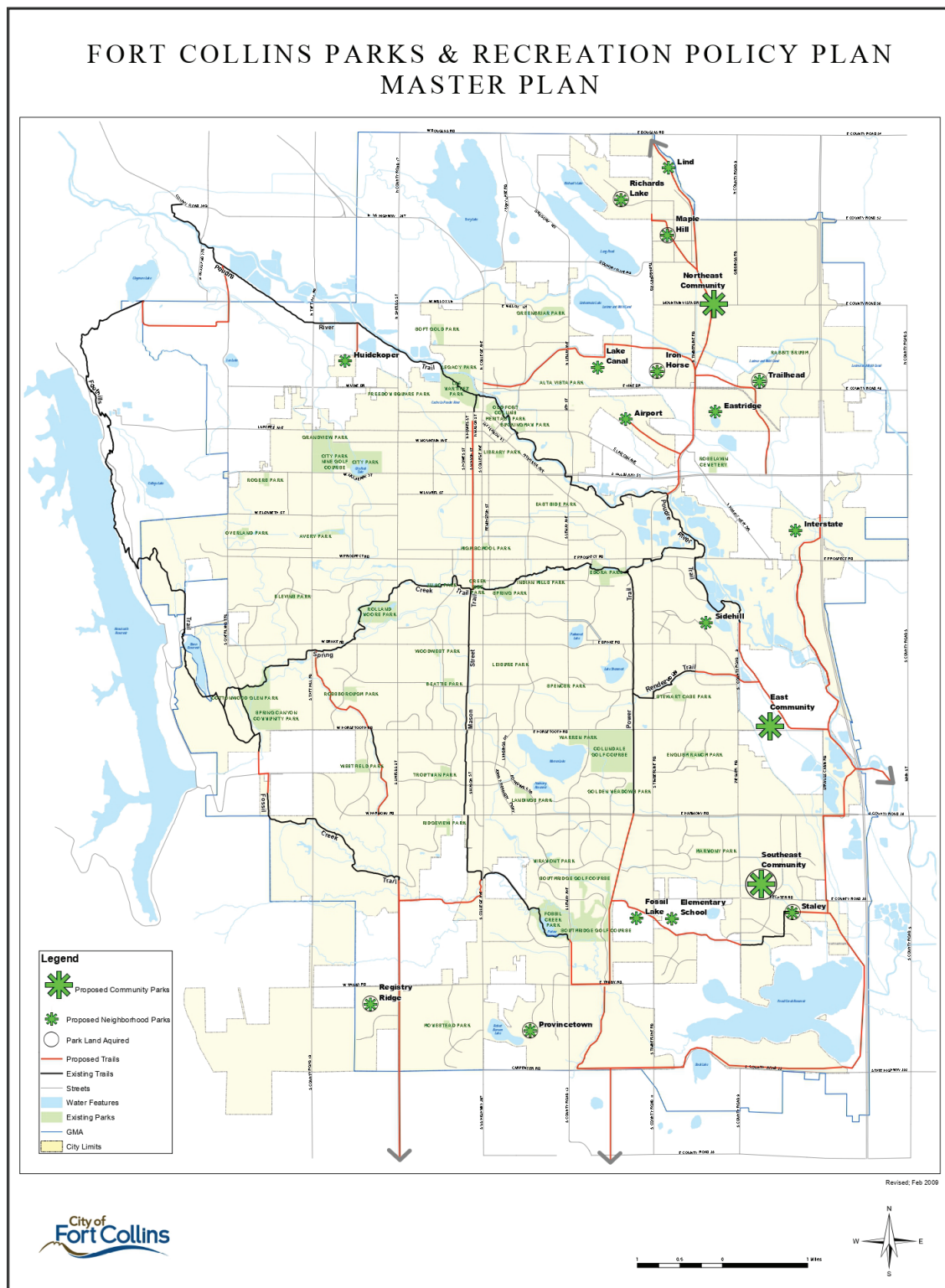


Figure 10. Fort Collins Parks & Recreation Policy Plan Master Plan Map, ca. 2008. Courtesy of the City of Fort Collins, pg.76, "Parks and Recreation Policy Plan." Digital copy of Master Plan available at <https://www.fcgov.com/parkplanning/pdf/policy-plan.pdf?1528733790>.

obtained for the trail” adding that “As the City’s natural area program developed and the city became more urban, trails were better located to avoid sensitive environmental areas along waterways.”¹¹³ Interestingly enough, the 2013 plan explains the proposed route of the trail through the East Community as opposed to following the banks of the river as strictly as the PRT had done in the early decades of construction.

The extremely brief establishment of individual section completions appears as follows:

The Poudre Trail was in place from Taft Hill Road to its junction with the Spring Creek Trail by 1986. The trail was expanded to Larimer County’s Lions Open Space in LaPorte to connect with the Larimer County trail system in 2004. A portion of the trail west of Taft Hill Road is a rails-to-trails conversion accomplished through extensive willing seller negotiations with landowners. The trail section from the junction with the Spring Creek Trail down river to the Colorado State University’s Environmental Learning Center was completed in 1987. The underpass of State Highway # 14 (Mulberry Street) was completed in 1991 while the underpass of north College Avenue, near the Power Plant, was completed in 1995.¹¹⁴

The authors of the document also recounted the increase in sales tax beginning in 1973, which initially funded trail construction before ending in 1983. Alongside the sales tax, Timnath planners also documented the establishment of the Conservation Trust Fund and GOCO, having originally been established with the explicit purpose of statewide lottery proceeds funding recreational development. The background history regarding funding is then used to illustrate the state of the city’s current recreation budget, with \$730,000 being spent on maintenance of existing amenities, leaving some \$470,000 for “trail planning, design, right-of-way, and construction.”¹¹⁵ Naturally, the preamble surrounding funding and trail history allows the authors of the document to address failures head-on, as the planners noted that “The 2008 Plan’s Capital Improvement Section includes the completion...of the Poudre River Trail including underpasses in 2008 and 2013” adding that “Significant progress has been made but funding is not sufficient to complete these trails by 2013.”¹¹⁶

The authors, however, made clear the trail’s transregional connectivity and began explicitly describing it in these terms. Recounting some of the changes between 2008 and 2013, the plan notes that the planned expansion of the trail was successful in being approved for a GOCO grant. Further, as part of this application, as well as future planning, the trail was pinned to explicitly start “emphasizing connectivity with the transport system, population centers, and with regional communities.”¹¹⁷ While this was largely in reference to Laporte and Timnath, the language left open the door for future work to connect Greeley and Fort Collins. The idea continued to be passed around without firm commitment, yet this statement would be the first step in getting that idea committed to paper.

¹¹³ City of Fort Collins, “2013 Paved Recreational Master Plan,” November 19, 2013, p. 1, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.fcgov.com/parkplanning/pdf/2013-paved-recreational-trail-master-plan-3-3-14.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

Furthermore, the PRT received more specific dedications in the 2013 plan, along the lines of recommendations that had been in the Windsor plan. Planners identified that the trail would benefit from several small improvements, such as: including a shade shelter west of Taft Hill Road, a vault restroom and paving at the Taft Hill trailhead, two new spurs that would connect Lincoln Junior Highschool and Wood Street, as well as generic drainage improvements to prevent flooding in underpasses along the trail.¹¹⁸

For some context, the plan also detailed the Spring Creek trail, which had its original route mapped out in the early 1980s like the PRT. Similarly, there also was the desire to improve Spring Creek through mitigation of flooding, widening of the original track surface, and the improvement of underpasses along the trail, specifically those which crossed the Burlington Northern Santa Fe line that runs north to south through the center of Fort Collins. Also noted for improvement was a series of signs along both trails. Following on from the IGA that the city had signed with the PHA, and similar agreements between the PRTC and Windsor as well as Greeley, signage was now emerging as a critical part of the trail experience. Signage helped guide the interpretation of the historical sites that travelers frequented along the trail, and signage had almost resulted in a legal case against the PRTC. As such, planners within the Parks and Recreation department dedicated an entire section to signage planning.

First, planners conducted a survey of existing infrastructure, which included the assembly of an “inter-departmental technical team.”¹¹⁹ This team traversed the trail network and created three signage designations; destination, etiquette, and safety. Destination signs often denoted distances traveled, and the direction of significant locations in relation to the user. These signs also included mile markers that were equipped with Emergency Locator Systems which when activated would operate as a phone connection to emergency services. This marked a significant safety improvement over the simple promise that the city’s police department would enforce trail regulations. Conversely, etiquette signs were those that gently reminded users of the proper code of conduct on the trail. Building on the multi-use nature of the trail system, bicyclists, walkers, equestrians, and others, all used the trail and much like a traffic system had different rights-of-way. One example included cyclists passing on the left, often accompanied by an audible tone produced by a bell or simply raising one’s voice. With increasing usage of the system, users had to be instructed on how to share the space. Safety signs were more straightforward, often stating the danger of flooded areas, or demanding a reduction in speed. Following the 2012 study, the technical team redesigned signage across the network and installed consistent designs on the PRT and Spring Creek in 2013.¹²⁰

By 2013, the PRT was cited as having 474,000 visitors yearly, second after Spring Creek at 650,000.¹²¹ The system was working effectively, planners argued, yet there was still the matter of the Timnath bound expansion. The end of the document lays out future projects and includes several improvements to be made

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

to the PRT. Firstly, a series of realignments which involved minor changes to the placement of trail slabs. Specifically, this realignment would begin at the Woodward Technology Center, an aerospace company that operates transnationally, investing specifically in gas and energy systems and with plants in Germany, the UK, Bulgaria, as well as Illinois and California. Its headquarters, positioned on Drake Road, west of Williams Lake, would be the site of realignment. There would be another realignment at Lemay Avenue, specifically the section crossing the river on the north side of Fort Collins.¹²² This Lemay realignment would also include a new pedestrian bridge crossing the river, meant to be completed in conjunction with a Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) project replacing Mulberry Bridge. These improvements largely arose due to the nature of early trail construction. As had been the case in Weld, planners soliciting landowners for easements on their land often had little choice in the final routing of the trail, meaning that often sections came close to the river and were open to flooding. Realignment then, allowed planners to rectify these issues and was often necessary as the banks of the river shifted. Forty years is ample time for a river to shift, with erosion on outer banks occurring quickly, especially in the face of flooding events such as the 1997 incident.

Other minor improvements included the construction of spurs connecting new sites, including the CSU Environmental Learning Center (ELC) and Arapahoe Bend Natural Area. These two sites on the east side of town would bring the trail closer to Timnath and the I-25, and according to the 2013 plan had received funding. The ELC, existing as an extension the CSU Warner College of Natural Resources, is a 212-acre natural area situated in east Fort Collins along the banks of the Cache la Poudre. The site was originally donated in the late 1960s; however, the current building is an important public-facing feature of CSU. The ELC regularly hosts events such as teen programs, summer camps, and K-12 School Programs.¹²³ The ELC's position along the banks makes it a major trailhead for the PRT, and with the last section completed here, the PRT will wrap around the building adding yet another stop for commuters. Finally, one objective was to continue past the Arapaho Bend Natural Area to Timnath, which was also noted as having received funding. Maps within the document show little difference from those already included, with the prospective connection to Timnath shown in red designating its status. What is different, however, is that the map shows completed sections of trail on the east side of I-25. Timnath trail planners had between 2008 and 2013 been successful in completing sections of the PRT within their borders and now waited for Fort Collins to bring the trail from the west to I-25.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Poudre Heritage Association, "CSU Environmental Learning Center," accessed November 10, 2024, <https://poudreheritage.org/locations/environmental-learning-center>.

Formal Declarations and Transregional Timnath

After the 2013 plan committed to finishing the eastern sections of the PRT, two new plans emerged in 2020. One, from Larimer County, was concerned with open space planning. Sites such as Arapaho Bend Natural Area were of great interest to the county, with many having witnessed spaces like it become enveloped by the growing city of Fort Collins. Another plan, produced by the Town of Timnath, dealt with the PRT more explicitly. Timnath is a small settlement in comparison to the other urban areas in Larimer County. Boasting a population of just 6,487 in 2020, the town had been settled in 1882 for many of the same reasons that had prompted settlers to set up shop in Fort Collins and Greeley. Adjacent to the river, early farmers in Timnath raised alfalfa and livestock, and traded between Windsor and other Larimer settlements. A rail connection between Greeley and Fort Collins was established in 1882 also, running through Timnath and granting inhabitants access to an expanding network of agricultural products. Timnath also was subject to one of the very few successful Japanese attacks on US soil during the Second World War. A floating bomb, released over the Pacific, drifted onto a field outside Timnath in 1945. A local boy named Jack Swets would recount seeing a large pillar of fire as the balloon touched down, later finding another device during the following ploughing seasons.¹²⁴

Discussions of global events and local impacts aside, Timnath produced the “Comprehensive Plan” in 2020. From the start of the document, planners recognized the unique geography and opportunity that was open to the town. Timnath was well connected to the I-25 and found itself between a growing Fort Collins to the west, with Windsor expanding to the south. Transportation would be a critical theme within the plan, as the opportunity to work as a conduit for commuters brought the promise of increased budgets. The town council made this clear by stating that they envision a Timnath with “multiple physical connections and mobility options” as well as “connected with an integrated system of parks, trails, open space, and protected natural areas.”¹²⁵ Further, the council stated that they saw Timnath becoming “an influential player in Northern Colorado regional partnerships.”¹²⁶ Of course, the PRT having multiple stakeholders from Weld and Larimer County, provided the perfect opportunity to enter the arena for Timnath; the trail would form another method of transport that would bring commuters, cyclists, equestrians, and walkers to the town.

Like Fort Collins, the steering committee members engaged community representatives from each of Timnath’s neighborhoods, as well as other stakeholders. This community outreach included sixteen individual interviews alongside four public meetings and several online questionnaires. Among those who responded, residents identified “thoughtful growth” as a key interest alongside maintaining a small-town

¹²⁴ Barbara Fleming, “Fleming: Bomb dropped on Swets farm during WWII,” *Coloradoan*, May 11, 2014, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/local/2014/05/11/fleming-bomb-fell-timnath/8973933/>.

¹²⁵ Town of Timnath, “Comprehensive Plan,” February 25, 2020, p. 3, accessed November 10, 2024, https://timnath.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Timnath-Comprehensive-Plan_Adopted-Feb2020-compressed.pdf.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

feel. Many also recognized that Timnath was incredibly well connected, without the congestion that plagued Greeley and Fort Collins. Crucially, when asked what respondents would improve in the town, fourth on the list was trails after pedestrian connections, preservation of agricultural land, and the development of the town's main street. With 99% of residents commuting out of Timnath for work in other cities, pedestrian connections and trails were perceived as critical elements for a growing town. Planners assert:

Trails connect to quality of life and outdoor recreation amenities, such as Timnath Reservoir, the Poudre River Trail, local parks, and Old Town Timnath. In 2019, the Town of Timnath, along with Larimer County and the cities of Fort Collins and Windsor secured a grant and property easements to complete a large section of the Poudre River Trail through Timnath. The Northern Colorado I-25 expansion will make the underpass of the trail possible just north of Wal-Mart, making the 35-mile trail between Bellevue and Greeley a reality.¹²⁷

Timnath was committing to paper, and in a legal document, the intent to link Greeley and Bellevue. Whereas trail builders in Larimer and Weld County had been open to the idea, with regards to the PRTC and Fort Collins, both entities had remained largely focused on simply building sections that connected centers within both counties, leaving open the door to connecting both regions. The plan also outlined another aspect of trail construction regarding the PRT. There were two accepted plans. Firstly, the existing trail network in Timnath often used side streets and existing urban infrastructure to connect one end of the town to the other and beyond. Secondly, Timnath planners devised the Poudre River Trail Ultimate Alignment. This secondary version was a pre-emptive realignment, planned to take the trail out of more urban areas and closer to the river itself.

Number one on the list of projects to be completed was the PRT. Planners identified the need to “coordinate with Larimer County, private partners and/or surrounding communities to build the regional trail system by applying for grants, coordinating with willing landowners, and dedicating general funds.”¹²⁸ Clearly, entities such as the PRTC had been operating in such a fashion outlined since the 1990s, and their method was no doubt responsible for inspiring some elements of collaboration across the county line.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

¹²⁸ Ibid.



Figure 11. Parks and Natural Areas Framework Map, ca. 2020. Courtesy of the Town of Timnath, pg.44, "Comprehensive Plan." Digital copy available at https://timnath.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Timnath-Comprehensive-Plan_Adopted-Feb2020-compressed.pdf.

Fort Collins responded to Timnath's planning document with the 2021 Parks and Recreation Planning document. In essence, there is little discussion related to the PRT. The document largely builds on the recommendations of the 2008, and 2013 planning documents produced by individual departments within the city. It did not use language quite as concise as Timnath either and mentioned the PRT as an asset when outlining context for trail use. Further, the plan restates what had already been revised by the previous plans. Quite simply, in the action list section of the document, there are several objectives.

First, to continue to implement "the recommendations of the Paved Recreational Trail Master Plan" and second, to "coordinate trail expansion with surrounding communities and Larimer County."¹²⁹ These broad strokes parallel the planning commitments from the county itself and previous plans. These statements also share some similarities in their vagueness of plans with Windsor. Potentially, the language here across all planning documents is deliberately vague. Owing to the nature of acquisition for trail easements, it is possible that planners in these documents recognized that devising an "ultimate" alignment much like Timnath had was bound to be fraught with issues, as the specific routing of the trail was often up to landowners who would only provide a concrete route when approached. There is however consistency across all the documents discussed here.

Each document, whether concerned with open spaces, parks, zoning, or trails like the PRT, mentions collaboration extensively. This uniformity in language suggests that collaboration, a key component of early methods of trail building, remained critical to the authors of such documents. Legacy continued to emerge more thoroughly in Weld documents, with Larimer opting for largely utilitarian language regarding trails. Regardless, both stress agriculture as a key theme, and collaboration to achieve various goals.

2021 saw the trail come closer to completion than ever before. The remaining section to be completed, that underpass under the I-25, and connecting Timnath to Windsor, are issues that have been debated over as recently as, well, the present. The final sections of this text will discuss the most recent developments regarding the trail and use the history of the trail to speculate conservatively on new possibilities for trail connection in the current day.

¹²⁹ City of Fort Collins, "ReCreate: Parks & Recreation Master Plan," January, 2021, p. 286, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.fcgov.com/parksandrecplan/files/fort-collins-parks-and-recreation-master-plan-spreads-web.pdf?1627053367>.

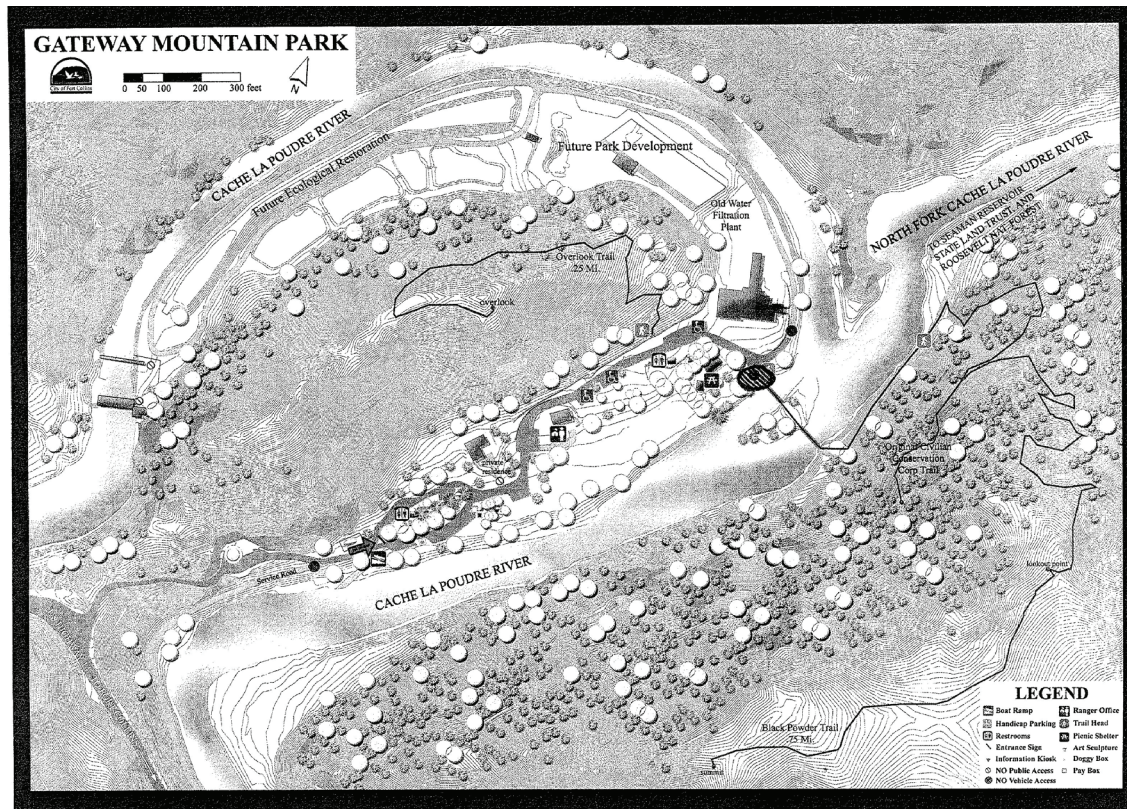


Figure 12. Gateway Mountain Park Map, ca. 2005. Courtesy of the City of Fort Collins, "Agreement for Placement of Interpretive Signs."

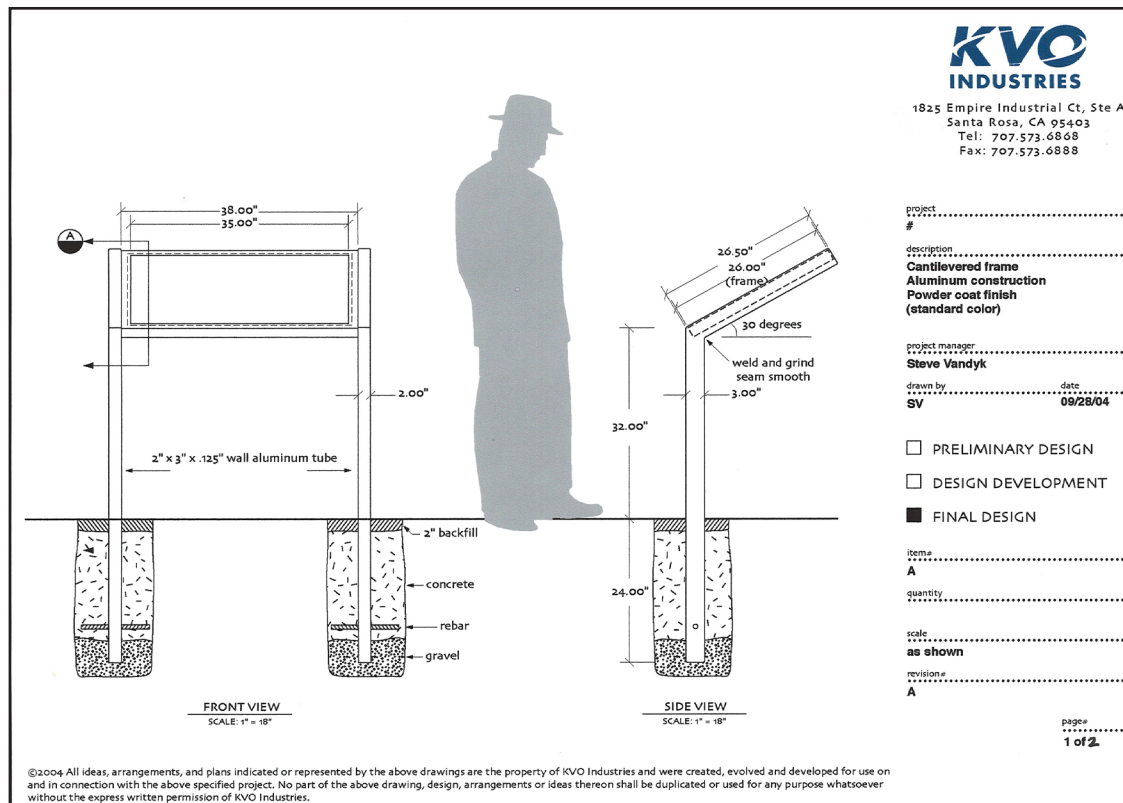


Figure 13. KVO Industries Cantilevered Frame Design Diagram, ca. 2004. Courtesy of the Poudre Heritage Alliance, "Agreement for Placement of Interpretive Signs", Heritage Trails Collection.

Chapter 5:

Wandering Through Weld County: Recent Developments Between Windsor and Greeley

Today, one will find that Weld County retains much of its agricultural roots, carried on over the past several decades. If one were to make a trip into the area, they might be witness to a series of signs that populate the otherwise sparse county roads. In simple black paint on a white reflective background, about a foot across are the words “Right to Farm Community” complete with a small image of a tractor. Travelers across the trail might be lucky enough to see one of these for themselves, as the trail now connects Windsor and Greeley. Martin Lind grew up on a farm outside of Windsor, and Scopel, as well as Otis, lived in the county during the legacy of the Montfort family. Even Ketterling, originally native to Montana, settled in Greeley after receiving work related to agricultural engineering. Each has an attachment to farming.

Though the farming heritage of these communities still permutes almost every aspect of daily life, settlements within Weld have changed dramatically. Census data from 1970 shows the population of the county resting under 100,000. In 2020 that figure had ballooned to 340,036. Between 2010 and 2020 alone, the county grew 30%, being the second fastest-growing county in the state at that time. It is expected that by 2050, the county will be home to over 620,000 residents.¹³⁰ Agricultural production, as defined by the county’s long-range zoning plan, has increased. In 1997, a year after the formal recognition of the PRTC, there were some 3,142 ranches. By 2017 that number had grown to 4,062. Agriculture remains the largest employer, followed by mining, utilities and construction respectively. Perhaps owing to the political culture that had driven private charity over central planning with regards to the PRT, the government employs the least amount of people. Housing remains cheaper than the state average, demonstrating the potential for enormous growth. Developers such as Lind have been able to take advantage of a growing market, and now many from across the country, and even internationally, call Greeley and Windsor home. These changes have

¹³⁰ Weld County Government, “The Weld County Population & Development Report,” December 31, 2023, p. 5, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.weld.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/7/departments/planning-and-zoning/documents/long-range/2023-wc-pop-dev-report.pdf>.

brought about a shift in the culture of the county, still firmly rooted in fields of alfalfa. Most importantly for the PRT, these changes have required a new generation of planners to reorganize and calibrate their objectives on the trail. This chapter documents some of those reorganizations in Weld specifically.

Masterplans such as the 1995 BHA plan for the trail tried to grapple with some of these changes but lacked the accuracy required for long-range planning. Thus, seven years later in January of 2002, the city of Greeley produced the “Greeley Parks and Trails Masterplan.” The thirty-page document written by the EDAW consultancy firm begins with a description of the city’s settlement. Horace Greeley is credited with the informal county moniker “Go West young man, go West” before the document states that “the City has established a legacy of providing ample parks for its residents.”¹³¹ Indeed it did. Park Island Grove, where the PRTC had first put together sections of the Weld portion of the trail, had been used as a site of remembrance initially. Local bands of Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Sioux once used the site for burial, and beginning in the 1870s, residents of what would become Greeley began to rest under the shade of cottonwoods that formed a grove. The first rodeo was held on the site in 1898 and would continue to be held annually eventually becoming the Greeley Stampede, an event that continues to this day.¹³² There have also been musical performances at the site with Flo Rida playing at the park in 2023 alongside Tyler Hubbard and Dustin Lynch.¹³³ The 2002 plan also cited a statement from a long-range vision for 2020, noting that it supported the promotion of “a healthy, diverse economy and high quality of life responsive to all its citizens and neighborhoods.”¹³⁴ For planners in the Parks and Trails Department, this meant preserving green infrastructure created by “parks, open space, and trails.”¹³⁵ EDAW, making their deliverables clear to readers, note that they were tasked with defining a comprehensive citywide recreational trail system, trail classification, design standards, and performance criteria. The city was attempting to categorize its existing resources, including the PRTC, to accurately identify areas of improvement.

In the second chapter of the document, which is chiefly concerned with existing resources, the planners chose not to include private holdings. Further, EDAW planners add that these private holdings are only supplementary to the resources owned in their entirety by the city. One example provided are the facilities that were constructed by Greeley’s largest educational institution, the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). Hank Brown served as chairman of the university from 1998 to 2002, before succeeding Elizabeth Hoffman as president of the University of Colorado in 2005—the same institution that had completed the 1984 feasibility study decades earlier. The plan notes that the facilities provided by UNC were subject to annual negotiations between the university and city, and as such could not be considered reliable sources of recreation.

¹³¹ The City of Greeley, “Greeley Parks and Trails Master Plan,” EDAW, January, 2002, p. 4, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://greeleygov.com/docs/default-source/cprd/parks/report.pdf>.

¹³² “Island Grove Park,” Poudre River Trail Corridor, December 10, 2018, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://poudretrail.org/island-grovetpark/#:~:text=The%20History&text=This%20location%20was%20once%20used,was%20extended%20to%20the%20park>.

¹³³ Alexander Kirk, “Greeley Stampede: Here’s the 2023 concert lineup,” 9News, June 16, 2023, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.9news.com/article/entertainment/events/greeley-stampede/greeley-stampede-concerts/73-b966382a-e071-48df-a3e5-cec4573a18ab>.

¹³⁴ The City of Greeley, “Greeley Parks and Trails Master Plan,” EDAW, January, 2002, p. 4, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://greeleygov.com/docs/default-source/cprd/parks/report.pdf>.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

The second chapter, however, does make an exception for the PRT. In a subsection titled “Existing Trails” the authors of the plan state:

The City currently has approximately 18.7 miles of primary, multi-purpose trails. These trails are paved, typically 8 to 10 feet wide, and are intended to accommodate a variety of uses including biking, walking, jogging and in-line skating. The majority of the existing trail system (14.4 miles) is adjacent to roadways as they were constructed as a retrofit to the existing development pattern, which did not provide for separate trail corridors. The exception to this is the Poudre River Trail system.¹³⁶

Planners in 2002 recognized the unorthodox nature of the PRT. The document stated that it was part of a “larger regional system” that “is planned to link to Windsor and eventually, Fort Collins.”¹³⁷ Further, these planners added specific descriptions of the trail’s physical characteristics, mainly put in place by Ketterling. Authors noted the PRT’s length at twenty miles, with a variable width of twenty-five to fifty feet, along with a consistent 10-foot concrete trail surface. Multiuse for equestrians, hunters, and those wanting a softer running surface had been recognized. EDAW also noted the sections to be completed. In 2002, the Town of Windsor had yet to be linked by the “Golden Spike” driven at Rover Run Dog Park. EDAW noted that “A 6.5-mile gap exists” and that “Several miles of trail have been constructed west of the UGA (Urban growth area) connecting to Windsor.”¹³⁸

With stock taken, EDAW moved on to the pressing issues and how to address them. Alongside three different sections for different classifications of parks and their planned improvements, the planners stated trail needs. Confidently, the authors asserted that “Time and again when Colorado residents are surveyed, the most frequent activities in city parks, trails and open space are walking, nature observation, bicycling, picnicking and jogging.”¹³⁹ EDAW cited data from Arvada, an offspring of Denver, that stated an incredible 80% of residents walked or hiked on a trail system. To this end, EDAW affirmed that multi-purpose, off-street trails accommodate activities that were desired by the community. A wide corridor, therefore, would provide a place for the activities at a relatively low cost compared to dedicated facilities or agreements with privately owned facilities. Legacy was not as apparent in the conception of the trail, instead it served to provide an amenity for the growing population. Horse riding is mentioned several times in this justification explicitly before the authors of the document concluded that “Trails are an economical way to provide recreational needs for a large number of residents.”¹⁴⁰ EDAW did however note that the most desirable trails were

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

those that traversed open space corridors and had ample space for different activities. The PRT was being conceived as a utility and intraregional commuting corridor. An economic advantage that would suit a variety of needs with little upfront cost to the city itself.

This is largely unsurprising. EDAW, working on contract for the city, understood that planning language needed to be immediately applicable. Discussions of legacy, culture, and heritage were unimportant if the trail could not be justified economically. Further, EDAW stressed comparison to other settlements and argued that Greeley could become a regional leader in terms of trail planning. In the following paragraph, the authors stated that “Communities vary widely in the availability of recreational trails for their residents” and this ranged from “24 miles in Fort Collins, to 40 miles in Westminster and 48-miles in Boulder.”¹⁴¹ Planners used these case studies to suggest Greeley could compete with bigger settlements across the state and was worthy of comparison in recreation strategies. Greeley, the planners assessed, provided 18.7 miles of off-street trails, and that four-point-three miles of that total were provided by the PRT. Further, EDAW added that the city had participated in the extension of the PRT towards Windsor, stressing its importance as a regional link.

To further build their case, EDAW calculated that 0.24 miles of trail existed per 1000 residents of the city, compared to an average of 0.21 per 1000 residents across the Front Range. Perhaps guarding themselves from intense critique the authors added that “It is not entirely fair to compare levels of service standards (e.g., miles/population) between communities because the recreational value of a trail along a roadway is different than the value of a trail within a dedicated open space trail corridor.”¹⁴² EDAW had implicitly recognized the PRT was unique in this regard, crossing sections of farmland and rural areas. Westminster emerged as the leading example of what could be achieved, with 0.4 miles per 1000 residents. “This level is not unreasonable to assume as an appropriate goal for [the] City of Greeley” EDAW argued, before adding that “Planning for new developments should include these connections, adding value to the development and community as a whole.”¹⁴³ EDAW had also recognized the financial benefits that could be reaped by community-conscious developers such as Lind and the Orr’s. This incentive could be channeled to secure cooperation about zoning and other administrative barriers.

With this transition, the authors of the plan moved into their final section, recommendations of the Master Plan. Consuming a third of the plan’s total pages, EDAW laid out their categorization of trails and stated what they thought was best for the city. To compete with other settlements on the Front Range, Greeley should locate primary trails within a 50-foot easement, paralleling the model laid out by the PRTC with its existing sections. Further, these new sections of the trail should be vegetated to offset stormwater flooding, which has wreaked havoc on the PRT, and communities in recent history. Trails were to be located “where feasible” in scenic locations “but not within or immediately adjacent to sensitive vegetation or

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

significant wildlife habitat.”¹⁴⁴ Further, there was to be an “adequate buffer, up to 100 feet, between trail development and wetland areas where feasible.”¹⁴⁵ This list of recommendations did not include reference to community building explicitly, nor was there mention of historic importance once again. Instead, EDAW continued with its immediately practical approach. Planners likely understood these aspects to be managed by the established PRTC and emerging PHA. EDAW did, however, continue to use recommendations that had been outlined in the 1984 study, and planning documents such as Koirtyohann’s produced in 1975. In a paragraph under multi-use, the authors recognized the importance of providing soft surfaces, an idea consistent with those early documents, and even produced imagery remarkably like previous plans.

Towards the closing pages of the document, EDAW supported the linkage between Windsor and Greeley, suggesting that it could significantly improve the amount of trail space per 1000 residents, up to a level that would allow Greeley to compete with Westminster, Boulder, and Fort Collins. This also recognized the challenges that the PRTC faced. Succinctly EDAW state that “Currently, there is no dedicated funding source for trail corridor acquisition and trail construction” adding that “Many other communities dedicate their annual Colorado Lottery funds to trail corridor acquisition.”¹⁴⁶ This, however, would not be an option for Greeley. Just as the city had been unable to follow the model established in Fort Collins, mainly through a preference derived from its political culture, the city would be unable to do so again although for differing reasons. “Greeley does not have this option because its lottery funds are encumbered for the Downtown Recreation Center until 2003” and that “then the funds are dedicated to the Union Colony Civic Center through 2006.”¹⁴⁷ Recreation facilities, with their vastly more expensive construction and operating costs, had been deemed as the more worthy recipient of lottery funds, perhaps owing to a desire to provide more specific recreation without burden to the taxpayer. After 2006, EDAW stated that upwards of \$600,000 annually could be dedicated to the trail system, including the Greeley to Windsor sections of the PRT. In the meantime, however, the city should adjust the subdivision ordinance to secure a right of way for the trail amid emerging developments, specifically on the west side of the city. Further, EDAW went as far as to suggest a trail construction fee, which would directly acquire funds from developers to secure trail construction. Finally, the consultants once more recognized how useful GOCO grants had been to the PRTC, stating that “grants available from Go Colorado and other organizations are often substantial and may be viable sources of funding, especially for trails that provide connections to other communities.”¹⁴⁸ Much like the PRTC however, the planners noted that “most of these grants require matching funds, so finding

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

a dedicated funding source for trails in Greeley should be a goal of the city.”¹⁴⁹ EDAW had recognized the problem that PRTC had solved with community engagement and local private fundraising. EDAW would not be the last group to do so, and their plan would become a point of reference for those grappling with the same challenges just a decade later.

Building From Experience: Integrating Existing Knowledge

Four years after the Greeley planning document had been adopted, the Town of Windsor would build on existing agreements with PRTC. By September 2006, the city required an amendment to its existing intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with the trail board. Titled in a utilitarian manner much akin to the Greeley plan, the “Intergovernmental Agreement Regarding the Poudre River Trail” illustrates the changing relationship between different management entities in more recent years. There are also a few key differences between this document and the Greeley plan that demonstrated further refinement in how a new generation of planners approached the management of the trail. It is interesting to note also that this IGA differs somewhat from the previous IGA’s discussed in previous chapters. Rather than a simple list of broad shared goals, or simple language, the 2006 Windsor IGA contained more detailed stipulations regarding the city’s engagement with the PRTC.

The document began by recognizing the previous agreements between the city and PRTC, mainly restating the basic goal that the “City, Town and County agreed to cooperate in order to develop a trail along the Cache la Poudre River for educational, cultural and recreational use.”¹⁵⁰ It is worth noting that, unlike the Greeley plan, this statement recognized the trail beyond its utility purposes, explicitly stating the potential for educational and cultural use. By 2006, the activities of the PHA and PRTC were likely applying pressure in municipal offices regarding the preservation of cultural resources and educational opportunities. Windsor, still a growing town, potentially recognized that both non-profits had been able to acquire significant funding through grant applications that stressed education as a main theme and use of the river.

This is also blended in with the next statement, which recognized how previous agreements had “addressed a variety of different topics relative to the development of the Poudre River trail system, including trail route and corridor designation; trail acquisition; uniform signage, maintenance, and other improvements.”¹⁵¹ Mixed between the practical elements, that had received a majority of the attention in the Greeley plan, was the mention of signage, which had previously been a large part of the PHA’s physical presence on the river and trail. The document also noted that the city, town, and county (referring to Greeley, Windsor, and Weld) had provided funding on a two-year cycle for the purpose of hiring a trail manager, such

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Mike Ketterling, “Intergovernmental Agreement Regarding the Poudre River Trail,” September 18, 2006, Town of Windsor, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

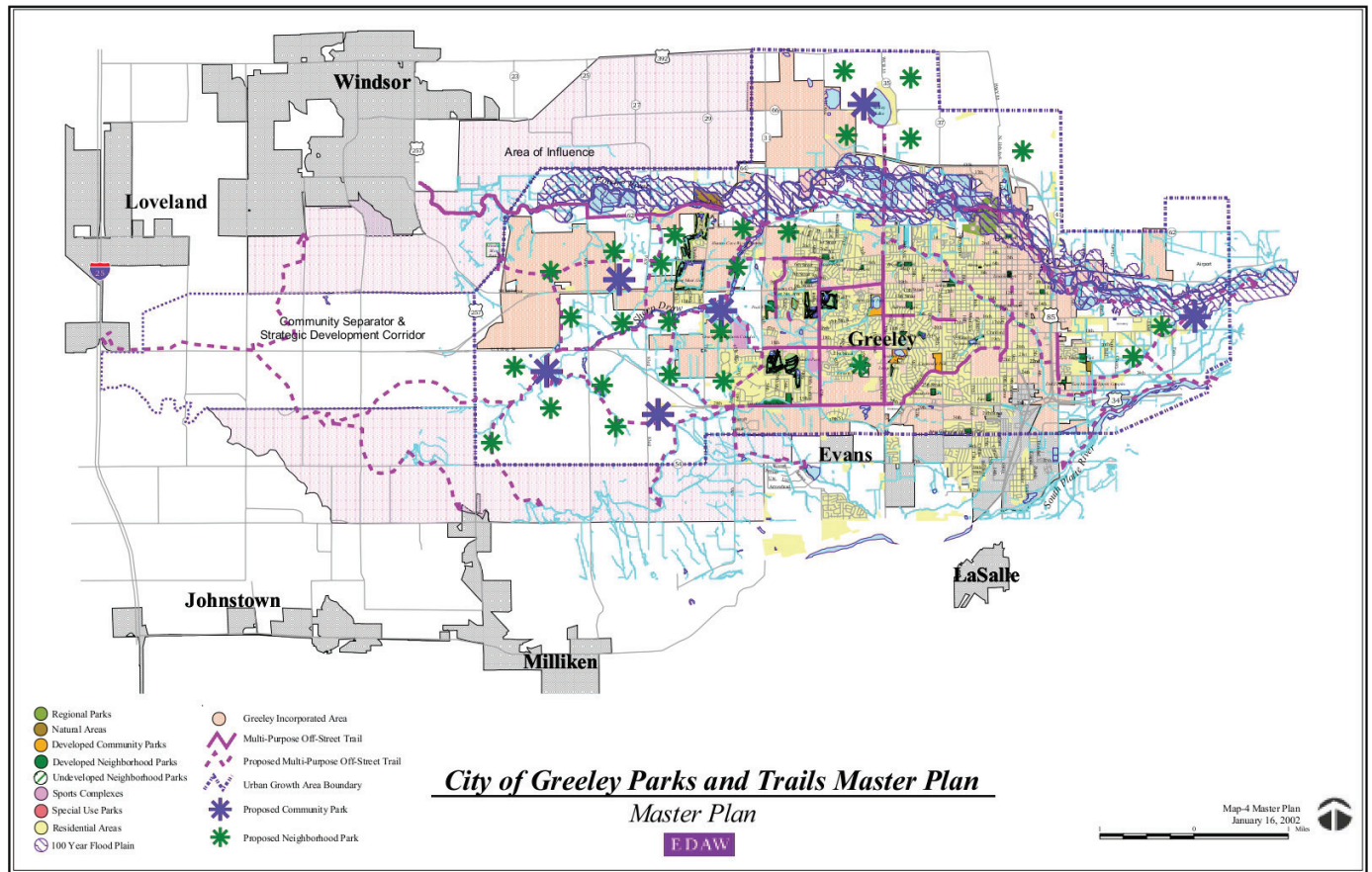


Figure 14. City of Greeley Parks and Trails Master Plan Map, ca. 2002. *Courtesy of the City of Greeley.* Digital copy available at <https://greeleygov.com/docs/default-source/cprd/parks/report.pdf>.

as Bob Hinderaker. By 2006, significant portions of the Weld trail section had also been completed, and the document notes that “with the substantial completion of the trail the Corridor Board seeks a uniform means to manage and maintain this recreational resource for the benefit and safety of the general public” and that “it has been determined that cost effective and cooperative management of the trail system is most efficiently managed through the Corridor Board.”¹⁵²

In wading through the specific legal language of the document, these passages show that by 2006, the PRTC had proved its feasibility in the eyes of Windsor and the wider county. These sentences signify that the PRTC had been able to achieve its goals and to the extent that the county determined the project was best managed by the PRTC. This is important, as the recognition ensured the continued cooperation of Windsor, and specifically that funding in the form of “financial and in-kind contributions” would be “provided in an equal manner from the City, Town and County.”¹⁵³ The next section then begins to provide a set of stipulations for future management of the PRT.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

First, the terms of the agreement are to be reassessed yearly, to ensure that management changes can be implemented quickly. This is interesting to compare to the federal legislative process around the river's designation status, which forms the bulk of the second section. Titled "Creation of Poudre River Trail Corridor," it notes: "Upon advice of the Corridor Board, the parties hereto collectively designate a trail corridor along the Poudre River in Weld County, Colorado, to be hereinafter referred to as the "Poudre River Trail."¹⁵⁴ Recalling that this document was drafted in 2006, three years before the official recognition of the National Heritage Area along the watershed, it is possible that the entities involved recognized the legislative process being undertaken by federal policymakers. It is also interesting to note that the recommendation comes from the PRTC themselves and is pushed onto Weld County.

Again, it is likely that PRTC members were witnessing the work of the PHA, specifically the study into alternative management strategies along the river and forwarded these recommendations to Weld County officials. Indeed, perhaps it was an easy argument to make for the PRTC, as the organization could refer to previous 1996, 2001, and 2002 versions of the federal bill for designation alongside citing the work done in Larimer County. The justifications for Weld County were outlined in a similar language to IGA's signed in Fort Collins and federal bills. The authors stated that "The parties find that it is in the best interests of health, safety, and welfare of their citizens and the general public to develop said Poudre River Trail for educational, cultural, and recreational use and that the alternative transport systems facilitated by said Poudre River Trail will promote improved air quality health, and environmental awareness and fitness."¹⁵⁵ Once more deciphering exactly the meanings behind such words, it is clear that the authors of the Windsor IGA were combining two strands of thinking. One was apparent in the Greeley plan, that being the tangible benefits that a trail corridor would provide in the form of citizen satisfaction, opportunities for multi-use, and physical health benefits. Additionally, the IGA has detailed stipulations for sources of funding and budgets much akin to the 2002 Greeley plan. The other strand of thinking was one purported more strongly by the PRTC, PHA, and language used in the federal bills that would eventually give the river its final designation. This language and interpretation had been present since the formation of the PRTC and before in various forms across Larimer County. It was the language of legacy, history, culture, and themes that couldn't be easily quantified. It was the language that made its presence known through carefully crafted signage and interpretive models.

The document then proceeds to try and formalize the methods by which the trail route and acquisition of easements were being undertaken. One lengthy section is specific in ensuring that Weld County, Greeley, and Windsor could continue to individually acquire the right of way for the trail, this would however be done explicitly in cooperation with each other, and "upon the advice of and with the assistance of Corridor Board."¹⁵⁶ This combined with the previous statement concerning the advice of the PRTC is yet further another example of the growing influence of the group. Now, the PRTC was influencing municipal policy

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

directly, formally, and with efficiency. Further, the document shifted some of the financial burden that had been a sticking point for the group repeatedly during the previous decades.

The document states that “the appropriate fee interests, rights-of-way, easements, accesses, or donations for the designated routes of the Poudre River Trail lying within their respective political boundaries using only such funds or resources from the parties to this agreement.”¹⁵⁷ In essence, the brunt of funding would be dispersed amongst the PRTC and each municipality, with the municipal authorities taking the responsibility for funding within their boundaries. Further, “Each party to this agreement shall be responsible for any necessary legal expenses incurred in the course of Poudre River Trail acquisition.” meaning there was now a shared pot with multiple contributors that could be accessed to secure further progress on the trail.¹⁵⁸ This pot of funding, named the Poudre River Trail Funds, could be accessed by the PRTC and dispersed accordingly. The catch, however, was that unlike before in which funding from different parts of city, town, and county budgets could be accessed for trail purposes on a case-by-case basis was now not an option. The document affirms that “No party hereto shall be required by virtue of entering into this agreement, to fund any portion of the Poudre River Trail from general monies or from monies from any source other than the Poudre River Trail funds.”¹⁵⁹ This part of the agreement traded a variety of funding for something altogether more stable, which, now that most of the Weld sections had been completed, ensured that maintenance could be met on a regular basis, with formalized assistance. Furthermore, the “City, Town and County shall each be responsible for the construction of an improvement to the portions of the Poudre River Trail lying within their respective jurisdictions” although “such improvements may be assigned to and managed by the Corridor Board upon mutual consent of the jurisdiction and the Corridor Board.”¹⁶⁰

This enabled a level of flexibility for further construction on the trail, with the preference being that each respective municipality now fund certain improvements within their jurisdiction. Should the PRTC prefer management, a shifting of responsibility could be achieved. The reasons for this could include a level of expertise that the PRTC might have with concern to specific sections or improvements. It is important to note that by 2006, Ketterling had been overseeing construction on sections of the trail for a decade, learning the intimate layout of the land through precise labor. In essence, this part of the agreement formalized the method by which responsibility would be designated, further granting the PRTC a level of sophistication and organizational maturity.

Interestingly, maintenance and signage received their own dedicated section, essentially stating that as with the construction of improvements, each entity would manage signage within its political boundaries. The PRTC however, would ensure that signage was consistent across the trail, coordinating rather than

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

directly implementing the improvements. Further in the spirit of coordination, the PRTC would “determine the level at which basic safety, convenience and enjoyment of the trail is achieved and annually prepare a budget which accomplishes such objective.”¹⁶¹ This again was not unlike the requirements that the board had to meet in prior grant applications, such as with the Montfort Foundation grant. This budget was then to be submitted to each signing party, for equal payment and contribution.

There was however an interesting stipulation with this part of the agreement. Specifically, Windsor and Greeley were designated specific sections of the PRT. Windsor would maintain from “Highway 257 west to the terminus of the Trail at the westernmost edge of town” whereas Greeley would maintain “Highway 257 east to Island Grove Park.” The county, however, with differing political boundaries and a less concrete work group would, in lieu of manpower and materials, simply “contribute an amount equal to 1/3 of the costs associated with the maintenance and oversight of the trail maintenance.”¹⁶²

Public art also received mention in the agreement, perhaps building on the language of legacy and interpretation. Greeley committed to assigning 1% of capital construction funds to install public art “associated with the respective improvement project.”¹⁶³ This amounted to somewhere in the region of \$8000 and recognized that, despite only a small amount of the trail passing through the city, many citizens used the trail to explore the rural landscape beyond its borders. This cash could also be supported by further donations acquired by the PRTC, meaning that the group maintained the need and ability to continue fundraising from within the communities in Weld.

Finally, one of the last sections of the document concerns law enforcement on the trail. While this might seem like a moot point, the enforcement of law on the trail would be a brief issue in the years to come. Simply, this section stated that “The law enforcement agencies of City, Town, and County shall be responsible for enforcement of laws on those portions of the Poudre River Trail which lie within their respective jurisdiction.”¹⁶⁴ In 2014, this would become immediately applicable.

In September of that year, the City of Greeley and the PRTC received a letter from Rocky Mountain Gun Owners (RMGO), another non-profit organization concerned with the protection of the Second Amendment with the group taking issue with signage on the trail within Greeley. Specifically, signage that had been coordinated by the PRTC stated that “No firearms, paintball, fireworks or similar” with the intention being the prevention of accidents on the trail.¹⁶⁵ Unknowingly, this signage as pointed out by RMGO had violated state law. Following a series of legal cases in the early 2000s, specifically *Regents of the University of Colorado vs. Students for Concealed Carry on Campus*, gun owners were and still are allowed to carry firearms in public

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Rocky Mountain Gun Owners, “Letter of Notice Regarding Legal Action,” September 24, 2014, folder “2011-2020”, PRTC.

spaces. The trail and its signage were in violation of that legal precedent, and thus the letter stated that “RMGO is writing to give you a chance to amend the policy and signage to come into compliance with the law. If that is not done promptly, we will institute litigation against the city of Greeley to force it to comply with state law.”¹⁶⁶

At this time, Otis remained involved with the PRTC and lent many years of legal experience to the case. After considering the threat of legal action, which might have jeopardized the agreement with Greeley, Otis simply changed the sign. Instead of stating no firearms, updated signage still visible today instead reads “no discharging firearms.” This small wording update did not prohibit gun owners from carrying firearms on the trail, it simply stopped them from discharging them. Legal challenges assuaged, it seemed that the 2006 IGA had held strong, and that agreement would form the basis of planning in Windsor in the following decade.

Open Space in Windsor

Between 2006 and 2019, the communities of Greeley and Windsor would continue to develop plans for municipal improvements. While these developments were often associated with zoning, tax law, and other areas of municipal governance, trails would continue to receive brief mention. In 2019, Windsor would conduct a community survey much akin to the work done by EDAW in 2002. Updated for the decade, this survey became critical for the Windsor Parks, Recreation & Culture Strategic Plan, published in 2020.

The document was completed this time by Pros Consulting Inc., in cooperation with staff from the town, including Eric Lucas then director of Parks, Recreation, and Culture alongside Tara Fotsch, Bob Worthen, Wade Willis, and Kendra Martin. Within the recommendations, the report stated that the department’s vision was to “Be the national leader in exceptional recreation experiences” much akin to the element of competition that had existed in the 2002 EDAW plan. A smaller section was dedicated to the PRT in document overall, with the trail only appearing a handful of times across 182 pages. By 2020, construction on the scale of the late 1990s and 2000s was unnecessary, with Windsor and Greeley connected. Instead, the plan dedicated attention to trailheads that had been connected to the PRT already.

County Road 13 had one of these trailheads, and the plan noted that overall, the site operated “excellently.” Thanks to decorative signage, clear access to the PRT and then Eastman Park, the trailhead operated as intended, with little room for improvement. The only part noted, was that as the site became more and more popular with the growing population of Windsor, traffic could become an issue. Specifically, the report states that there is an opportunity to “Decrease speed limit approaching the crosswalks and add traffic calming measures for higher visibility.”¹⁶⁷ For once, the issue with the trail was not actually concerned with the trail itself. Instead, consultants applauded the work and pointed to an increasing amount of traffic

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Town of Windsor, “Parks, Recreation & Culture Strategic Plan,” June, 2020, p. 82, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.recreationliveshere.com/240/Parks-Recreation-Culture-Strategic-Plan>.

as the main issue. Considering the challenges that had existed in the decades preceding the report, high levels of traffic must have seemed like a relief to the PRTC and Windsor.

Likewise, the Kodak Trailhead at CR19 & Poudre Trail Road was applauded for its proximity to an archery range, its decorative stone signs, and clear access to the trail. The main challenges here were the “unattractive” storage boxes at the site, an aging parking lot, and again a high level of traffic. The issues once again were to be resolved by traffic calming measures. By contrast, the Kyger Open Space area which remained largely untouched by signage or development. Situated on Weld County Road & County Road 13, the site was remarkably sparse. The document describes the area as “currently a blank canvas for design” with a large body of water on the property.¹⁶⁸

The blank canvas mentioned was noted for having good access to both the PRT and another trail called #2 Ditch Trail. Before any lasting changes could be made to the site, consultants recommended that the area be evaluated in later plans, and where needs for the entire system were identified, Kyger could be adapted to meet those needs. The PRT receives one last mention in the document, summed up simply in a few bullet points alongside the #2 Ditch Trail. Quite simply, it is described as “Well landscaped, well maintained in appropriate areas, and natural areas.”¹⁶⁹ Further, the trail was noted for its well-paved surface, great informative signage, and good trail locations with ample views. The challenges were summed up in two sentences, that simply noted an inconsistency with trailhead quality and some minor maintenance issues.

By 2020, the PRT been under construction in Weld County for nearly three decades. Those three decades had been summed up by consultants in a handful of mentions regarding the recreation opportunities available to Windsor residents. Even the challenges facing the trail seemed to decline in magnanimity. While the legal challenge posed by RMGO had been substantial, a simple change of wording had been all that was required to avert disaster. Maintenance focused on restoring minor pavement cracks, a stark contrast to the extensive flooding that disrupted sections in the 2000s. Much had changed in the decade that followed. Planners and citizens alike saw the trail differently from those that had laid its foundation. Organization and administration had been formalized for the long term, and the flurry of newsletters, fundraisers, and public events had slowed. The PRT needed to reclarify its goals for the connection between Larimer and Weld.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 6:

Looking Forward: CDOT and the I-25

The previous chapters have largely dealt with the past, specifically how the past can inform decision-makers in the present, and prepare them for the future. Beginning in the late 1960s, the story of the PRT has demonstrated the ability of communities to overcome unforeseen challenges in order to make real-world changes for Northern Colorado. This chapter then serves less of an analytical purpose and instead offers a chance to capture the state of the PRT at the time of writing. It is highly likely that the information communicated in the following pages will soon itself become part of the past, and inform future researchers and planners intrigued in the closing stages of the PRT, at the end of its almost four-decade construction period.

Much of this section is concerned with the crossing of the trail under the I-25. With mostly complete sections of the trail snaking from Greeley to Timnath via Windsor, and from Bellvue to the east side of Fort Collins, the trail is split by the concrete highway that extends north to south through the state of Colorado. This portion of the trail is under the administration of two familiar parties, and an agency that has received scant attention in this document thus far. Fort Collins and Larimer County planners continue to be in dialogue with CDOT, as to how exactly the final pieces of the trail will fall into place, and complete a trail so close to uniting a variety of communities. The role of the NFRMPO is discussed in greater detail here also, particularly the 2013 NFRMPO Regional Bicycle Plan. This document, for the first time, acknowledges the transregional corridor as one entity (Corridor #6). This opened the door for the funding needed to connect the two counties while outlining future corridors across Northern Colorado. Some of these final sections are minor portions of the trail—totaling less than a mile—that still require attention, including small segments planned for each side of the I-25 stretch.

Arapaho Bend, a large natural area adjacent to the crossing under the I-25, is still in need of a minor section of paved surface in order to connect an underpass to Fort Collins. The City of Fort Collins is also in the process of negotiating the construction of a small section on the north side of Arapaho Bend, to connect the park to the CSU Environmental Learning Center. East of the highway, another trail section still requires paving between the south eastern most limit of Timnath and Weld County Road 68 ½. It should be noted that adventurous cyclists with a penchant for wilfully ignoring signage have already transited these unpaved

sections in order to make the journey from Weld to Larimer, although this is highly discouraged. These paths in fact, often lie on existing tracks used by landowners to access the riverbank, it is these landowners that Larimer County and Fort Collins have been in contact with.

NFRMPO 2013 Regional Bicycle Plan

In 2013, the NFRMPO adopted a regional plan for cyclists produced by Felsburg Holt & Ullevig. With twelve corridors of travel recognized, the NFRMPO aimed to consolidate “existing bicycle infrastructure, data, and design trends” within the region and provide the fifteen member governments with “tools to support their local bicycle planning.”¹⁷⁰ This large document brought together existing plans from respective authorities, and much like the LWCoG, attempted to encourage transregional planning across Northern Colorado.

As has been seen with other plans, the authors of the document demonstrated the benefits of commuting by bike, stating that “economic impacts include savings from reduced gas consumption, additional retail sales, the attraction of charitable events, and reduced economic costs of mortality.”¹⁷¹ The NFRMPO mission of preserving clean air is apparent here, alongside recognition of some of the PRT’s historical benefits. The plan then outlined groups of users, highlighting Fort Collins and Greeley as particularly dense sites of student populations owing to the presence of CSU and UNC. Further, the document outlined areas of concentrated business across the region, establishing areas of potential users, and making the case for trail transportation.

With a basis of users and needs established, the document then puts forth its main suggestion. Under a section titled “Regional Bicycle System Enhancement” the plan notes that “One of the primary objectives... was to identify regional bicycle corridors that could serve as the spine for bicycle travel between and through local communities” with a recognition that Greeley and Fort Collins already possessed substantial systems.¹⁷² The issue however, according to the plan, was that despite these established networks, gaps existed between them that prevented easy commutes. The criteria for identifying regional corridors included consistency with existing municipal plans, the ability to support multimodal connections, and connections to regional trails. The NFRMPO recognized the utility of trails, specifically the ability to connect communities, and provide access to multiple types of users.

The Great Western trail was recognized as corridor #4, and the Front Range trail as #7. Both trails much like the PRT, had the ability to serve as commuting corridors for local users, and as recreational opportunities for a variety of citizens. Specifically, the plan recognized the PRT as corridor #6.

¹⁷⁰ North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization, “Regional Bicycle Plan,” Felsburg Holt & Ullevig, March 7, 2013, p. 1, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://nfrmpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2013-bicycle-plan.pdf>.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 50.

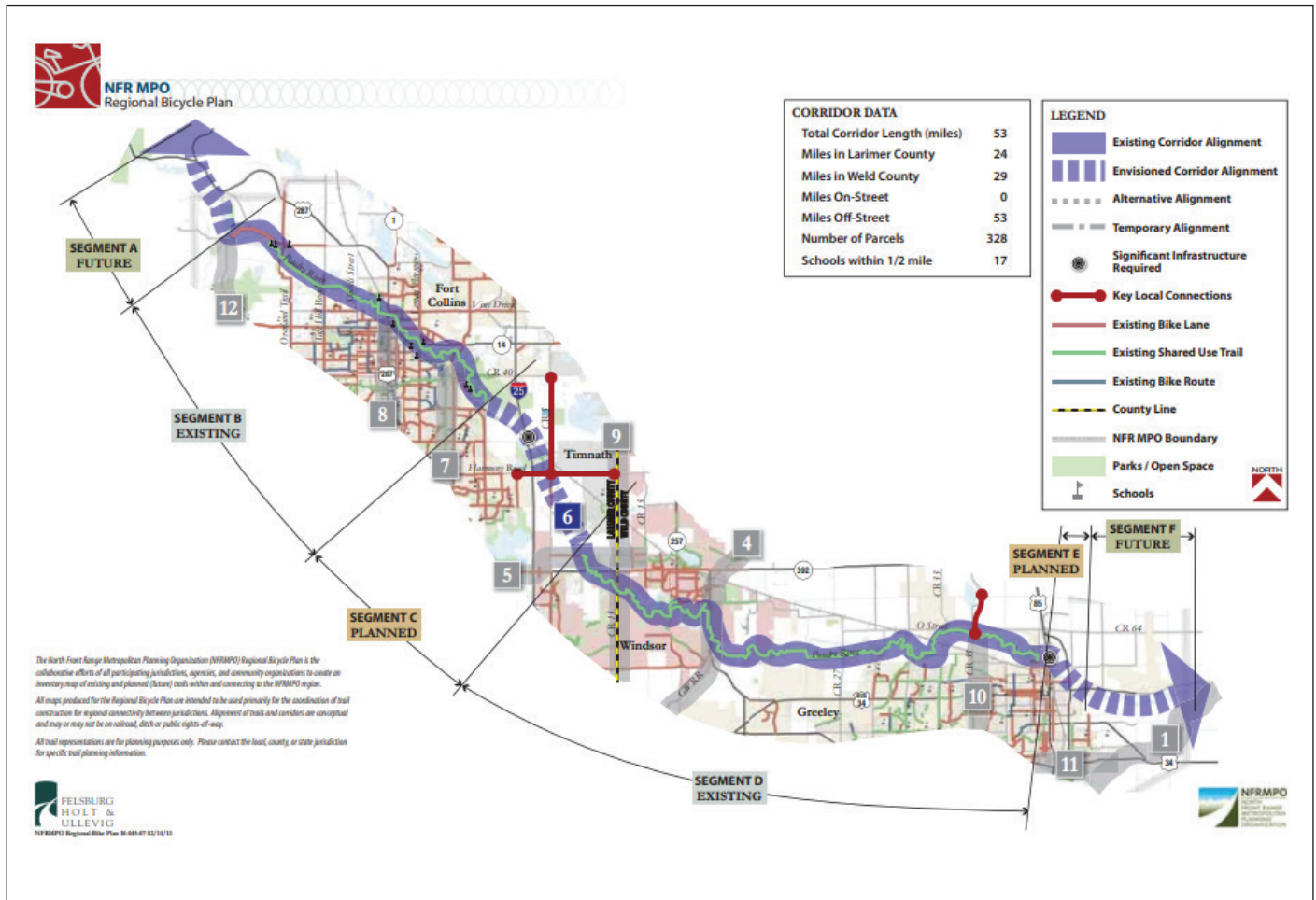


Figure 15. Map of Regional Corridor #6, ca. 2013. Courtesy of the North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization, pg.73, "Regional Bicycle Plan." Digital copy available at <https://nfrmpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2013-bicycle-plan.pdf>.

The authors state that "The Poudre River Trail Corridor is a nationally recognized bicycle pedestrian corridor" and that "When complete, it will connect: Larimer County, Fort Collins, Timnath, Weld County, Windsor and Greeley."¹⁷³ Further, the planners go as far as to state that the PRT is a "model for the regional collaboration required [to] construct a trail between multiple jurisdictions."¹⁷⁴ The importance of this document becomes clear in its discussion of future segments. Specifically, the authors detail the planned segments east of Greeley, that would extend the trail towards the confluence of the Cache la Poudre and South Platte River.

The document thus formally recognized the trail as a single united entity and consolidated a wealth of municipal plans. By putting these aims and ambitions in contact with one another, the NFRMPO continued to fill the purpose first pursued by the LWCoG in 1984. Both organizations understood the wide variety of invested stakeholders in addition to understanding the similar needs of users in both counties and attempted to coordinate action to satisfy those needs.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Further, the NFRMPO also started the NOCO Bike & Ped Collaborative during this period. The group continues to operate to this day, holding meetings monthly to conduct infrastructure audits and in 2015 held a Bike & Walk Conference. The event was attended by over 130 planners, engineers, and public officials, who convened at UNC to pursue their goals. These objectives are outlined on the group's website, but in brief, are concerned with the promotion and "investment in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure."¹⁷⁵

Highway Management and Access

CDOT, more formally known as the Colorado Division of Transportation, is a state agency that was formed in 1991, and is tasked with administration of the state's road infrastructure, as well as the regulation of licenses alongside the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Prior to 1991, the agency had been known as the Colorado Department of Highways, which had been operating since 1917. Initially, the three man commission had a small workforce of just forty-four colleagues owing to the small amount of road use and infrastructure. As the century progressed however, federal policy would spur monumental growth in the agency, and demand an increase in administrators.¹⁷⁶

The 1956 National System of Interstate and Defense Highways Act, pursued under Dwight D. Eisenhower enshrined the need for greater automobile travel across the nation via a system of interstate highways. Americans can thank this act in particular for the construction of the I-5, I-25, and I-55. Eisenhower himself had witnessed the conditions of the American road system on a military assignment in 1919. The then lieutenant colonel had supposedly stated that many western roads in particular were a "succession of dust, rust, pits and holes."¹⁷⁷ Historians have pointed to the act as one part of the emerging Cold War attitude, with heavy motivation for the project being the easy transportation of military goods across newly paved highways.

In Colorado specifically, the push from Washington to improve transport infrastructure would materialise in two notable projects. The I-70, stretching east to west across the state, is probably best remembered for the construction of the Eisenhower tunnel. The huge project lays sixty miles west of Denver, and is worthy of its own history. Completed in the late 1970s, the tunnel was at that time the highest road tunnel in the world at some 11,112ft, fitted with its own power generating facilities and an extensive ventilation system. Eisenhower tunnel continues to operate, making a drive across winding mountain roads an option for travelers instead of a mandatory route. The second project however, arguably receives more traffic, and is directly connected to the PRT.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization, "NoCo Bike & Ped Collaborative – NFRMPO," March 8, 2024, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://nfrmpo.org/bike-ped/noco/>.

¹⁷⁶ Colorado Department of Transportation, "CDOT History," December 21, 2021, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.codot.gov/about/CDOTHistory>.

¹⁷⁷ Bruce Watson, "Ike's Excellent Adventure," *American Heritage*, July/August, 2020, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.americanheritage.com/ikes-excellent-adventure>.

¹⁷⁸ Colorado Department of Transportation, "About the Eisenhower-Johnson Memorial Tunnel," accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.codot.gov/travel/ejmt>.

The second project, the I-25, started construction in the late 1950s, with an eleven-mile stretch around Denver accepting cars in 1958. A year later, another nine-mile stretch was added in 1959 between Denver and Pueblo, and by 1965 the I-25 connected Colorado Springs, Longmont, Trinidad, and Castle Rock. Finally, by 1966 seventeen miles had been constructed between north Wellington and the Wyoming state border. With the northern length established, the following year CDOT opened an eight-mile section connecting Fort Collins to the growing network. This first phase of rapid construction was ended in 1969, with I-25 boasting 299 miles of tarmac ready for use.¹⁷⁹ Greeley, the intended destination for the I-25, rejected the final plan leading to the current position of the I-25 which lies much closer to Fort Collins.

Of course, no highway is ever really complete. A drive along either will reveal constant road work and repair. Much like planners in Northern Colorado struggling with the task of providing recreation to a growing population, CDOT grapples with the never-ending increase of traffic along the I-25. Additional express lanes, special accommodations for bus use, and line markings are constantly being added to the motorway. Bridges in particular, are of especial importance. As vehicle ownership increases, and the weight, size and shape of cars continues to grow from those seen in the post-war period, many bridges have been modified or replaced entirely in order to support the evolution of automobiles.

The Cache la Poudre River, running west across Northern Colorado, was an obstacle that required a bridge both north and southbound. Initially supporting both lanes of traffic as early as 1966, the bridges in question are south of U.S Highway 34, and were topped by flooding in 1997 and 2013. Naturally, CDOT decided to include the bridges as part of its \$750 million North I-25 Express Lanes Project. The plan, currently in the process of being enacted, is to add further lanes to this northern stretch of the I-25 in order to accommodate increased traffic. Additionally, provisions are being made for bus stations in transit areas. More importantly, however, contractors in 2023 successfully completed the new bridge section thanks to financial contributions from Timnath and Fort Collins. Besides widening the bridge section for additional lanes, work also raised the banks of the river on either side of the bridge so that the new heightened structure can withstand a 100 year flood event.¹⁸⁰ This raising of the bridge now allows for safe passage under the highway, which had previously been impossible due to the low clearance between the riverbank and structure. Furthermore, CDOT paved a straight section underneath the bridge on the south bank of the Cache la Poudre, enabling Larimer county to finish the sections either side of the passage.

The accommodation of the PRT by CDOT has not gone unnoticed, with several regional news outlets applauding the work. The Coloradoan has been ferocious in its publication of updates, while more tailored groups have stressed the impacts that the work will have for trail riders. Dan Porter, writing for *Fort Collins Cycling News*, meticulously compiled updates on the final sections of trail construction before

¹⁷⁹ Colorado Department of Transportation, "Interstate 25 History," accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.codot.gov/about/CDOTHistory/50th-anniversary/interstate-25>.

¹⁸⁰ Miles Blumhardt, "North I-25 Express Lanes Project: What You'll See in 2021," *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, December 30, 2020, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2020/12/30/colorado-north-25-express-lanes-construction-projects-2021/4087351001/>.

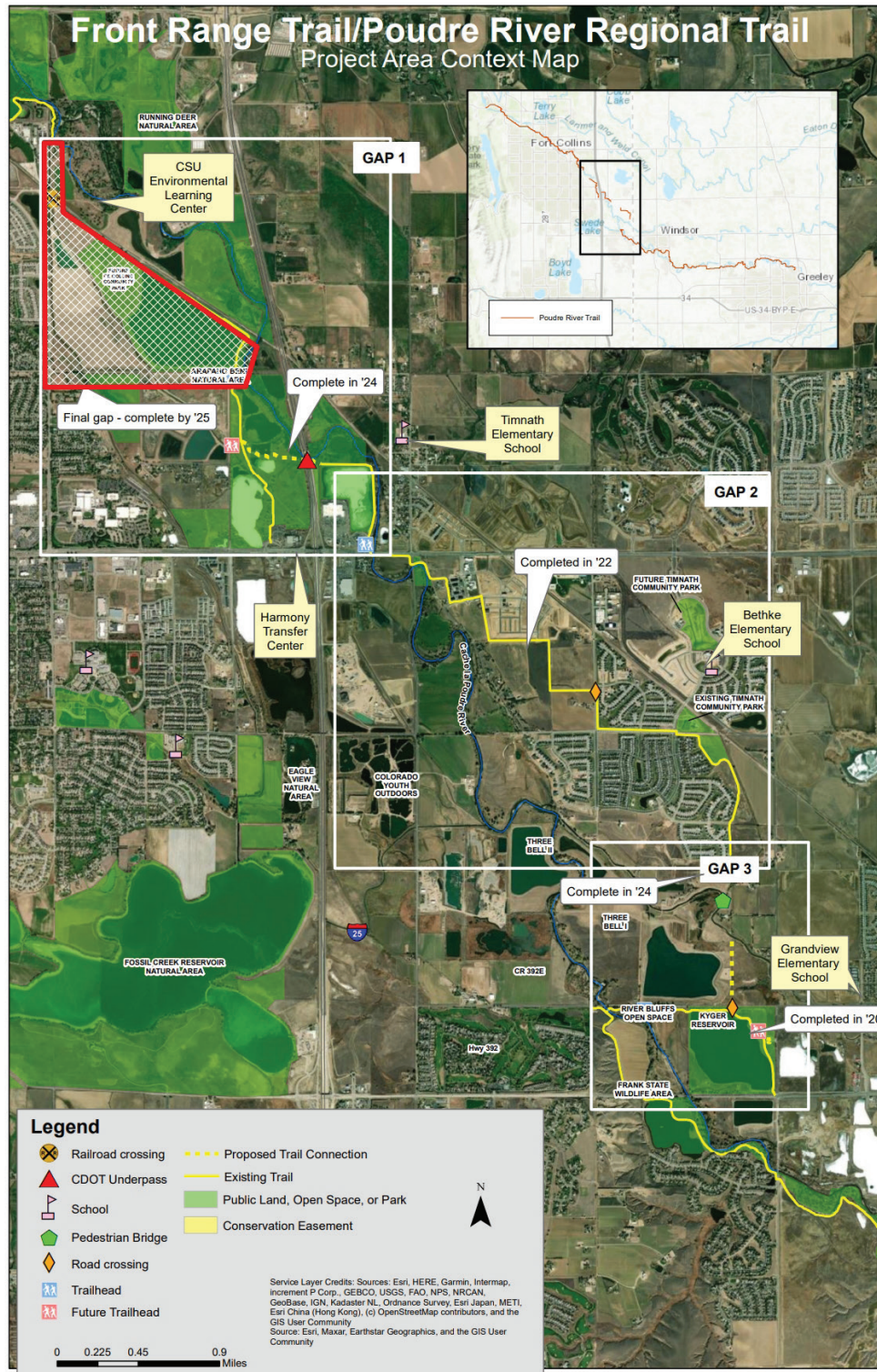


Figure 16. Poudre River Trail (Regional) Map, ca. 2024. *Courtesy of the City of Fort Collins.*
Digital copy available at goco-prt_context_wlogos_2-24.pdf.

publishing an article in July of 2024. Within that piece, Porter notes that it had been expected that the trail would be finished by the end of the year, however a pair of bald eagles nesting in Arapaho Bend prevented construction crews from beginning work.¹⁸¹ He notes however that the “dangol’ eagle” had “left the nest, and construction is planned to start in August.”¹⁸²

With the western connection of the underpass underway, the eastern connection to Timnath, and then Timnath to Windsor via the Kyger Open Space area is likewise a high priority. This stretch is listed on the Larimer County Project Status Report website as project number 5025. In a brief statement last updated in April of 2024, the page states that “a ten foot wide concrete trail with soft shoulders will be constructed on the south side of CR 23E (east of the River Bluffs Trailhead) north to the Timnath South subdivision, approximately one mile.”¹⁸³ As with the other sections of construction documented in this text, the question of funding is apparent. Making use of an already established pot of funding, the website also states that these projects are funded through GOCO and CDOT grants for recreation and access.¹⁸⁴

As a final note, and an addition to this text in the final stages of its preparation, Fort Collins recently announced the completion of the trail segment between the Arapahoe Bend Natural Area and the I-25 underpass. More information regarding this development can be found at the City of Fort Collins, or in an article produced by *The Coloradoan*.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Dan Porter, “Poudre River Trail Update – 07/16/2024,” *Fort Collins Cycling News*, July 16, 2024, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://yourgroupride.com/poudre-river-trail-update-07-16-2024/>.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Larimer County, “Project No. 5025 – Poudre River Trail,” October, 2024, accessed November 10, 2024, <https://www.larimer.gov/engineering/project-status-reports/project-no-5025-poudre-river-trail>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Miles Blumhardt, “Poudre River Trail section opening brings completion of popular trail closer,” *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, October 16, 2024, accessed November 10, 2024, https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2024/10/16/one-of-three-uncompletedpoudre-river-trail-sections-to-open/75705008007/?itm_campaign=confirmation&itm_content=news&itm_medium=onsite&itm_source=onsite.

Chapter 7:

The Poudre River Trail Today and into the Future

Documenting the trail has been an intriguing task. Discovering previously unstudied sources has allowed for a more in-depth look into the formation of groups, evolution of agencies, and a new understanding with regards to community collaboration and relationships. Further, engagement with actors from both Weld and Larimer County has stressed the importance that this work holds for those invested in bettering Northern Colorado. A few conclusions are worth restating here, alongside reflections on the process and potential flaws in the methodology.

The PRT is an intergenerational ambition, passed down through successive administrators and individuals, each bringing unique motivations and methods that often built on the findings of those that came before. Beginning in the 1960s, conceptual thinking began to lean towards open spaces and emphasized the preservation of valuable regional features. The river, older than time itself, has remained constant while landscapers, concerned citizens, industry, and agricultural concerns shifted their priorities and the built environment continued to change. Most apparent during conversations with some of the main figures named in this text is the realization that the river could do more than simply irrigate crops in Weld and become more accessible across the region. Recognition of this asset prompted a variety of agency formations, concerned with different potential uses. Organizations such as the PHA and PRTC followed differing priorities but agreed upon the importance of bringing access to the river, via a trail system. Similarly, municipalities such as Fort Collins and Greeley took differing approaches, with the former developing a trail system earlier than its eastern counterpart but stopping firmly within city limits during earlier decades. Weld County, Greeley, Windsor and the PRTC may have started construction slightly later, but from the outset imagined a trail that connected communities and provided a way to enjoy the river without setting foot in a kayak or tube. This conception prompted a revival of transregionalism in Northern Colorado. Studies completed by the LWCoG and a CSU student in the 1970s were revived and translated into a modern framework with the assistance of consultancy firms and masterplans.

It is, however, important to note that these differing methods were made compatible by the level of collaboration that seemed present across not only both counties, but multiple generations, and interests. Truly, if there is anything to take away from the history of the PRT, it is that individuals and the interests they may represent can come together and achieve long-term goals if the original motivation is preserved throughout.

Flowing away from more technical conclusions, it is worth stating the nature of the river and trail themselves. In many ways, the two are alike. The Cache la Poudre continues to meander, weave, and change. The flooding that was discussed in previous chapters continues to loom over the head of planners in both Larimer and Weld County. Informal conversations with some individuals named here within make clear that the original route was one of convenience where landowners permitted. Poudre River Ranch, for example, has much of the trail laid in floodplain land, where no permanent structures could be planted or nourished. This has undoubtedly left the trail victim to a changing course, in turn prompting the trail to change with the river. This relationship, between a ribbon of water and one of concrete, is a good metaphor for the project in its entirety. As time progresses, the river will change, and so will the trail. Those working in Northern Colorado have constructed their own river, complete with catastrophic events, and moments of beauty. Just like the river also, management of the trail will continue to evolve, responding to currents of belief, charity, and culture.

Interpretive Recommendations

This section outlines key interpretive opportunities identified during the research for this project and its accompanying digital StoryMap, “Cache La Poudre River Trail StoryMap Companion Piece to A Tale of Two Counties.” Drawing on Freeman Tilden’s principles of interpretation, as articulated in *Interpreting Our Heritage*, the project team selected stories that would reveal new information, provoke questions and further interest, and that were relatable to a general audience. These stories are detailed in the preceding chapters and summarized below, providing a foundation for interpretive signage and other educational initiatives.

To enhance visitor engagement, we recommend integrating digital and physical interpretive elements. QR codes placed on signage can connect visitors directly to the project’s StoryMap, while hyperlinks to StoryMaps should be embedded in relevant digital platforms, such as municipal and tourism websites.

StoryMap Links:

Cache La Poudre River Trail StoryMap Companion Piece to A Tale of Two Counties, by Devon Rebelez and Rio Teuber, 2024: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/47b255a0dda24106b6ee43f4444b8304>

Mapping the Story of Paved Trails in Fort Collins: An Overview of the History and Development of the City's Recreational Trail System, by Rio Teuber and Lucas Roy, Geospatial Centroid at Colorado State University, December 4, 2024: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ae060458191643a4931e68bd41b8e759>

Potential Interpretive Stories

1. Mark McCarthy and Interpretations of Wilderness

This narrative captures the evolving perception of the river as both a cultural and natural landscape. Mark McCarthy's 2009 editorial in the Greeley Tribune critiqued the Poudre River Trail as a hazardous wilderness, highlighting a gas tank explosion and cattle fencing as threats. His view contrasts earlier depictions of the river as a "working river," emphasizing industrial and agricultural contributions. This story illustrates the dynamic interplay of human and natural systems shaping the river.

2. Regional Trail Connectivity: NFRMPO's 2013 Regional Bicycle Plan

The North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization's (NFRMPO) 2013 plan marked a significant milestone, envisioning the trail as a fully integrated regional commuting corridor. Building on foundational work like the 1983-1984 feasibility study, the plan emphasized transportation along the river corridor, transcending municipal boundaries. It showcases the region's evolving commitment to interjurisdictional collaboration.

3. The LWCoG Feasibility Study (1983-1984)

As one of the earliest comprehensive studies, the Larimer-Weld Council of Governments (LWCoG) feasibility study established a vision for a transregional trail network. Its recommendations, such as multi-use trail surfaces and jurisdictional coordination, laid the groundwork for subsequent developments. Conducted by graduate students from the University of Colorado Denver, the study reflects early instances of academic-practitioner collaboration in regional planning.

4. Flood Events and Adaptive Management

Recurring flooding along the Poudre River has highlighted the necessity of adaptive trail management. Differences in geomorphology between Larimer and Weld Counties have led to varied responses, reflecting both geographical and institutional factors. These events underscore the importance of cross-jurisdictional cooperation and sustainable funding mechanisms for trail maintenance.

5. An Intergenerational Infrastructure Project

The Poudre River Trail's construction, spanning over four decades, represents a model of intergenerational collaboration. Each segment was developed by different stakeholders, requiring successive teams to adapt earlier plans to new contexts. This iterative process exemplifies the adaptive management of infrastructure projects, paralleling the river's organic evolution as described in the "organic machine" framework.

6. The Concept of a "Working River": The Kodak Property

The Eastman Kodak Company exemplifies the river's dual identity as a natural and industrial landscape. Kodak's collaboration with trail developers demonstrates how partnerships with industrial stakeholders were critical to the trail's success. This story underscores the multifaceted relationships between local industry, recreational infrastructure, and environmental stewardship, linking to broader themes of river management.

These interpretive stories provide a framework for engaging the public with the Poudre River Trail's multifaceted history. By emphasizing the interplay of human and natural forces, the narratives invite visitors to explore the river as a dynamic cultural and ecological system. Linking interpretive signage with digital StoryMaps further enhances accessibility and encourages deeper exploration of the trail's history and significance.

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Appendix A

Recent PRT Developments

Recent developments related to the Poudre River Trail (PRT) have progressed rapidly, making it challenging to fully integrate these updates into the main body of the text as the manuscript approached its final draft. This appendix captures these late-breaking developments and provides supplementary materials relevant to the trail's history and evolution. Additionally, a digital StoryMap, "[Cache La Poudre River Trail StoryMap: Companion Piece to A Tale of Two Counties](#)," created by Devon Rebelez and Rio Teuber, offers visual documentation of this history. A timeline from that project is included here for reference.

On November 25, 2024, Dave Kemp, from the City of Fort Collins Park Planning and Development, shared significant updates regarding the PRT's completion during a recorded conversation with the author. Mr. Kemp reported the successful completion of trail segments near Arapahoe Bend and the CSU Environmental Learning Center. He noted that the City of Fort Collins had reached an agreement with OmniTRAX, the operator of the Great Western Railway of Colorado, to utilize railroad property for the trail. This agreement resolves a longstanding obstacle posed by the Cottonwood Land & Farms property, which had previously impeded legislative efforts to secure the trail's route.

Kemp also discussed progress on a condensed construction schedule necessitated by nesting eagles in the area. Despite the tight time constraints, construction crews managed to meet the required deadlines. Furthermore, he hinted at potential future expansions of the trail, including increased connectivity extending northward from Fort Collins to Wellington. Additional information on these updates is available through the Public Utilities Commission and *The Coloradoan*.

Meanwhile, the City of Greeley is actively drafting plans to extend the trail further eastward. Although the exact length of these extensions is not finalized, current plans aim to extend the trail by at least seven miles to the confluence of the Cache la Poudre River and the South Platte River. Construction efforts are already underway at Poudre Ponds. Updates on these developments can be found in the *Greeley Tribune*.

This appendix and the accompanying resources aim to provide a snapshot of recent progress while preserving the broader context of the PRT's ongoing development.

Appendix B

Poudre River Trail Timeline -- Highlights

1826

Earliest account of the Cache la Poudre River getting its name, after fur trappers stored gunpowder on its shore.

1861

Larimer & Weld Counties established.

1876

Colorado becomes the 38th state; dubbed the Centennial State.

1975

Jacquelyn C. Koirtyohann produces her *Cache La Poudre Trail Interpretative Plan*, detailing the construction of a trail along the banks of the Poudre.

1978

Ground broken for what becomes future trail segments in Lee Martinez park.

1983

Students at CU-Denver produce a study drawing on Koirtyohann's work, outlining the construction of a transregional trail and calling for the creation of an entity to oversee it.

1984

The upper-Poudre River receives its Wild and Scenic designation.

1994

Poudre River Trail Board established.

June, 1994

Trail construction begins in Weld.

1995

Draft of bill designating the Poudre as a National Heritage Area.

1997

The formation of the Poudre River Trail Corridor Inc.

2002

Poudre Heritage Alliance established.

2008

East & West sections connected in Weld County.

2009

Formal recognition of the Cache la Poudre River National Heritage Area.

2024

Completion of Arapahoe Bend Natural Area segment.

2025 & Beyond

At the time of this project, concrete is being poured for the final two gaps on the trail, with one being next to the Colorado State University Environmental Center.

