

Soapbox: Time is now to support Poudre kayak park

Greg Speer 6:01 p.m. MDT October 3, 2014



The Thursday, Oct. 2, Coloradoan contained an excellent article summarizing the progress of the Downtown Corridor River Project and in particular the efforts towards finally having a kayak park built as a part of that project.

The updated Master Plan will be presented to City Council on Tuesday, Oct. 7, for funding approval. Our organization, Save The Poudre, has long advocated for a kayak park, and we would like to provide comments on the pending request for funding.

Since the 1980's, there have been different groups working to have a kayak park built. Early last decade, there was a resurgence of effort by a different group of kayak enthusiasts to get a park built with funds being pledged toward that goal. The city was on board and it looked like it would happen until the NISP proposal appeared, which caused concerns that the resulting decreased flows if NISP were built would make a kayak park non-viable. At that point, around late 2007, the city shelved the project.

In 2010, Save The Poudre, having seen many other communities in the state build and benefit from whitewater parks, decided Fort Collins and the Poudre River were likely missing out on something. Our top priority was always that any such project, while providing the recreational component, must also improve the river by enhancing habitat and hopefully mitigating flood risk as well. We knew that other communities with parks proudly touted the economic benefits of their parks and were curious about what the economic benefit would be for a park in Fort Collins.

Even though economics were not our top concern, we knew that dollars get the attention of decision makers so we contracted with CSU economist John Loomis, Ph.D., an expert on the economics of recreational amenities, to do an economic analysis with the result, a conservative estimate, predicting that a park would generate up to three quarters of a million dollars annually in overall economic impact. This indeed got the attention of City decision makers and the kayak park got pulled off the shelf with the kayaking community again coming forward to pledge funding. At the same time, the city was getting underway with its downtown river corridor restoration project so the kayak park logically became blended into that. Again, it looked like it was going to happen. Then, for a variety of reasons, including concerns by Parks & Wildlife biologists about whitewater play features negatively impacting fish, the kayak park stalled again.

Several things have happened since. The city hired a top-notch engineering group with expertise in kayak play feature design as well as fish passage, and the kayak enthusiasts became better organized forming the group, Poudre Whitewater Park, which has pledged \$1,000,000 toward the project.

Save The Poudre has been very impressed with the efforts of John Stokes, head of the Department of Natural Resources, and the rest of the team from his department and Stormwater, and Parks, in negotiating a very complicated project ultimately coming up with a design that hits the sweet spot of providing kayak play features while at the same time improving habitat, especially fish passage, and mitigating flood risk. We also are very impressed with the Poudre Whitewater Park group, which is to be commended. For these reasons, Save The Poudre strongly endorses the project and encourages citizens to voice their support to City Council for funding the project to the maximum extent. We feel that this is truly a win-win for both the river and the citizens of Fort Collins.

Greg Speer is secretary of the board of directors of Save The Poudre: Poudre Waterkeeper.