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Mayor



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Memorandum of Understanding

South Platte River & Tributaries, Adams & Denver Counties, Colorado Project

Colorado is a headwaters state. Four major river basins originate in Colorado, including the Arkansas River, Colorado River, Platte River and Rio Grande River. These four river basins provide water to many western and midwestern states and Mexico. The South Platte River is one of two tributaries of the Platte River, the other being the North Platte River.

South Platte River water and habitat were used, abused and denigrated over the years. The river is the vital lifeline for people, wildlife, domesticated animals and habitat. South Platte River water is used for drinking purposes – for human, livestock and wildlife uses; treatment of sanitary waste; industrial use; recreation; and habitat.

In June of 1965, Colorado experienced unsettled and turbulent weather patterns in the South Platte River Basin resulting in rains throughout the basin. Many storms pelted Colorado's northeast plains during mid-June. On June 16, 1965 heavy rains fell over the Cherry Creek and Plum Creek watersheds. The Plum Creek storm began six miles south of Larkspur where some 14 inches of rain fell within a three-hour period. The flood created by the Plum Creek storm resulted in devastation through the Denver metropolitan area, including the communities of Littleton, Englewood and Denver before flooding downstream, including Greeley, Fort Morgan, Brush, Sterling and Julesburg and into Nebraska.

The federal government approved design and construction of the Chatfield Dam and Reservoir after the 1965 flood. Construction began on the flood control project in 1967 and was completed by 1975. Chatfield Dam and Reservoir, in addition to Cherry Creek Dam and Reservoir and Bear Creek Dam and Reservoir, form the Tri-Lakes Project owned and maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The three dams and reservoirs provide critical flood protection for the Denver metropolitan area as well as downstream communities.

Following construction of the Chatfield Dam and Reservoir, the river downstream was further impacted by narrowing and straightening the channel thus reducing habitat and affecting wildlife. Over the years, local governments, including cities and counties, state government policies and ill-considered economic decisions gave short shrift to the impacts of land use and environmental degradation issues resulting in further deterioration of the river ecosystem.

In the aftermath of the 1965 flood, there was a realization that something needed to be done to reclaim the river and its corridor. In 1974, Mayor Bill McNichols created the Platte River Development Committee (PRDC) and appointed State Sen. Joe Shoemaker as its Chairman. Mayor McNichols and Senator Shoemaker co-appointed eight other committee members, including Ted Bendelow, Dana

Crawford, Marjorie Hornbein, Dan Trujillo, Potts Berglund, Hiawatha Davis, Phil Milstein and John Zapien. The PDRC became The Greenway Foundation initially led by Joe Shoemaker and now by Jeff Shoemaker. These early efforts focused on initial projects, such as Confluence Park.

Later, the Central Platte Valley became a focus of redevelopment with the relocation of the railyards, which opened the land in the center of Denver and adjacent to the South Platte River to development.

New initiatives were undertaken to build on those early efforts, including Commons Park, Centennial Gardens and Johnson Habitat Park as well as other new river parks. USACE Omaha District, the City and County of Denver and The Greenway Foundation implemented a successful half-mile ecosystem restoration project on the South Platte River at Mile High Stadium from the Colfax Viaduct downstream to Bronco Bridge.

Efforts continued for the renewal of the South Platte River through undertaking master planning studies during 2007 through 2010. These master planning studies – River North Greenway Master Plan, River South Greenway Master Plan and River Vision Implementation Plan – were completed in 2010 and provided the framework to move forward.

Mayor Michael Hancock led the successful effort to secure the initial seed money in the form of a \$4.6 million Great Outdoors Colorado River Corridor Initiative grant in 2012 that helped jumpstart the momentum that has resulted in nearly \$90 million in local, regional, federal and public and private funds to design and/or build 10 parks projects in Denver's 11.1-mile South Platte River corridor today.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Omaha District has jurisdiction over the South Platte River Basin. With the planning efforts undertaken during the period of 2007 through 2010 by the City and County of Denver, Mile High Flood District, The Greenway Foundation, The Trust for Public Land and many interested organizations and Denver citizens, USACE Omaha District took a renewed interest in the South Platte River, which lead to the USACE undertaking a study of the river and two tributaries resulting in the completion of the South Platte River & Tributaries, Adams & Denver Counties, Colorado (Denver SPRT) study (now project). The City and County of Denver matched the federal (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) contribution to the study dollar for dollar.

The Denver SPRT project is now ready for implementation. It received the all-important project authorization in the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 (WRDA 2020), which was passed by Congress and signed into law by the President in late 2020. Denver SPRT received dual authorization under ecosystem restoration and flood risk management. The project is authorized for a total cost of \$550,273,000 with a federal share of \$344,076,000 and a non-federal, local share of \$206,197,000.

The federal government rules do not require that we have all of the local match monies identified before they will begin appropriating funds for the project. However, their budgets are limited, and they must prioritize projects that will be able to match and use the funds immediately. We want to be ready. Especially now when we are all recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and need to put people back to work, boost revenues for the City and its businesses and residents.

The project will restore degraded ecosystem conditions as a primary benefit along 6.5 miles of the South Platte River and implement flood risk management protection in areas of the 6.5 miles as a secondary benefit. Flood risk management protection is the primary benefit in both Weir Gulch and Harvard Gulch

and ecosystem restoration as a secondary benefit in Weir Gulch. Recreation improvements is an additional benefit for the South Platte River and Weir Gulch.

The project could take up to 10 years to complete, depending on federal funding availability. This match will not have to be available up front. However, the City has to be able to assure the federal government that the match will be ready when they are.

Every effort will be made to secure funding to help meet the non-federal, local share of the costs of this important ecosystem restoration, flood risk management and recreation enhancement project. The first step is this Memorandum of Understanding.

Signees supporting the Memorandum of Understanding include:

- Mayor Michael B. Hancock
- Barr Lake-Milton Reservoir Watershed Association: Dan DeLaughter, President
- Colorado Water Conservation Board: Becky Mitchell, Director
- Colorado State University, Spur Campus: Assistant Vice Chancellor Jocelyn Hittle
- Continuum Partners: Mark Falcone, CEO/Founder
- Columbia Group LLLP: Jerry Glick, Managing Partner
- Capitol Representatives: Marge Price, Principal and David Howlett, Principal
- Denver Audubon: Karl Brummert, Executive Director
- Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce: J.J. Ament, President and CEO
- Denver Trout Unlimited: John Davenport, Past President
- Denver Water: James S. Lochhead, CEO/Manager
- East West Partners: Amy Cara, Managing Partner
- Gates Family Foundation: Tom Gougeon, President
- The Greenway Foundation: Jeff Shoemaker, Executive Director
- McWhinney: Ray Pittman, President & Chief Executive Officer
- Mile High Flood District: Ken MacKenzie, Executive Director
- The Nature Conservancy: Carlos Fernandez, Colorado State Director
- Revesco Properties (River Mile developer): Rhys Duggan, President, CEO & Managing Partner
- South Platte River Urban Waters Partnership: Samuel Wallace, Coordinator
- Trammell Crow: Bill Mosher, Senior Managing Director
- The Trust for Public Land: Jim Petterson, Colorado and Southwest Region Director
- ULI Colorado: Marianne Eppig, Director
- University of Denver: Chancellor Jeremy Haefner
- Urban Neighborhoods: Dana Crawford, CEO/Founder
- Urban Ventures: Susan Powers, President
- USDA Forest Service: Sherry Fountain, Urban & Community Forestry/Forest Stewardship Program Manager