

Soapbox: Save the Poudre through human interaction

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There have been a few statements lately regarding the Poudre River through downtown that have struck a small nerve with me.

Some folks apparently have the false notion that the Poudre River has a sole purpose to nature, and that man should not be allowed to interact with the river. While I agree that the ecological value of the Poudre should remain paramount, it must not be the one and only consideration if we are to have a healthy river through town.

The Poudre is a working river, serving many different needs and purposes. At times, these needs compete with one another, but the key to success is to focus on ways they can work together. I am not a kayaker, but to make unqualified statements in absolute opposition to a potential paddle park does little to help find this common ground.

To further claim that such sentiments are shared by the majority of citizens is unfounded. The paddlers that I know are some of the best river stewards I have ever met, and many of them combine both recreational and professional mastery, leading them to be known as some of the pre-eminent experts in river systems.

The Cache la Poudre River stopped being a “natural” stream more than 100 years ago, particularly within the Fort Collins city limits. However, that does not mean it cannot be a healthy river, complete with sections of both careful recreation and prime habitat, where appropriate. To that effect, I am extremely impressed by the recent efforts the city of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department has taken toward their Poudre River Projects initiative. If you have not done so already, I strongly encourage you to take a look at what they have going on. The summary brochure is fantastic.

It is no doubt a delicate balancing act when it comes to managing, enhancing, preserving and developing the river corridor through town. The multi-purpose approach the city is undertaking is precisely what needs to be done to ensure success. Gary Wockner of Save of the Poudre said the following regarding the recent Encompass – Block One development approval: “... both opportunity for developers and the public, and responsibility to appreciate, protect and restore the river. The Poudre is a beautiful but endangered river and so people dining at the restaurant overlooking its banks will have a unique opportunity and responsibility to appreciate the beauty as well as to protect and restore the river for future generations of people, wildlife and natural processes flowing through downtown Fort Collins.”

I could not agree more. The best way to ensure the future health of the river is to create stewards among all community members and groups. Being able to engage the river creates much more awareness and helps keep our working river healthy than does excluding human interaction. Whether that be a kayaker surfing a wave, a fisherman wading a seam, a child throwing a rock, a runner smelling the air, a stroller-bound infant hearing the sounds, or a diner simply observing the beauty from beyond its banks, these people become the voices for the natural inhabitants who cannot speak for themselves.

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