

The Uncompahgre River Corridor – A Valued Community Asset

The City of Montrose recognizes the Uncompahgre River Corridor as the “jewel” of Montrose and has a long-standing record of working to preserve, protect and enhance it. The city has committed hundreds of thousands of dollars to purchase land along the river, and has acted to make these areas accessible to the public by constructing several miles of recreation trails for citizens to enjoy.

In the early 1970's, the city acquired land along the river and built Riverbottom Park. During the mid 1980's, the city built a portion of the Uncompahgre River Trail along a section of the old narrow gauge railroad that stretches from Riverbottom Park to the Ute Indian Museum. In 1994 the city entered into a lease purchase agreement for the 110-acre Cerise Park area that includes over one mile of Uncompahgre River frontage. With funding assistance from the Colorado Lottery and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), trail systems have been enhanced and interconnected by constructing two pedestrian bridges across the river, the first being completed in 1996 and the latest, near the Main Street bridge, in 2005.

The city is now working toward completion of Cerise Park, a project that will enhance pristine riparian areas and create wetlands along the river corridor. An on-going project that will improve access to the river, improve fish habitat and stabilize riverbanks along a one mile section of river adjacent to Cerise Park is being accomplished with the help of a Colorado Division of Wildlife “Fishing is Fun” grant.



One should not conclude, however, that the city's interest in the Uncompahgre River corridor is limited simply to constructing parks and trails. A Greenway Feasibility Study, sponsored by the city in 2000, was prepared to help plan the river corridor through Montrose. This study included a riparian assessment, explored water quality, habitat, and conservation opportunities, and recommended several goals that the city continues to use in making land use decisions.

Preservation of the Uncompahgre River corridor is also an important element of the city's Comprehensive Plan and will figure prominently in the upcoming update of the plan. The existing plan, approved in 1998, includes several actions to “maximize the sensitive utilization of the river corridor to enhance the community's quality of life.” The city has used these actions as a guide in preserving and protecting the river. For example, as property along the river is annexed and developed, the city negotiates with developers to acquire river corridor property. Efforts are also underway to acquire additional open space dedication that, if successful, will preserve and protect many acres of open space in the proximity of the river. Successfully acquiring these properties often demands significant financial resources and the city has dedicated \$250,000 per year for that purpose.

There are, of course, limits on what the city can do to protect the river corridor. The city cannot make land use decisions involving properties not yet incorporated into the city. Regulatory oversight of waterways, wetlands and riparian areas falls under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers and developers must comply with federal regulations that restrict development in these areas. Finally, property owners have the right to use their land as they chose as long as they comply with applicable laws and regulations.

Without question, one of the reasons that we love Montrose is because the Uncompahgre River runs through it. Please be assured that city officials will continue to work within the bounds of their authority to protect this valuable community asset.