

C H A P T E R I V M A N A G E M E N T



Introduction

This chapter describes a framework for management of the river corridor. It is intended to address the issues and respond to the vision described in Chapter 1. The overall direction for this management framework is based on the analysis described in the previous chapters and guidance provided by the public, City staff and the CAC.

In some instances, the management actions contained in the plan confirm existing practices, such as the requirements that apply to commercial outfitters. New initiatives are also proposed, including recommendations for improving resource protection regulations, adopting new financial tools, and other strategies for enhancing the river corridor.



Tuber and swimmer in the "A Hole"

The overall management framework is presented as a series of principles and policies, organized by the following categories:

- Recreation (RE)
- Land Use (LU)
- Aquatic Habitat (AH)
- Terrestrial Habitat (TH)

For each category, a broad-reaching principle is defined followed by increasingly specific policies and management recommendations.

Taken as a whole, the management direction described in this chapter is intended to ensure a quality recreational experience while protecting the natural environment. It is also designed to minimize potential conflicts between the multiple types of recreational use occurring along the river.

A key principle included in the management framework is adaptive management. Periodic monitoring of resource conditions and user satisfaction levels is essential, and the plan must retain sufficient flexibility to allow for adjustments that respond to changing river conditions, new information, challenges and opportunities. A recommended monitoring program is outlined in Appendix A. The formal monitoring plan should be funded to ensure continuity of data collection and address the following basic river characteristics:

- Water quality
- Aquatic diversity
- Terrestrial habitat
- Recreational experience
- Adjacent land use

Recreation (RE)

Principle RE. Manage resources for public use while protecting the natural values of the River.

Policy RE-1. The Yampa River should be managed in a manner that preserves a range of recreational opportunities.

A recommended Recreational Intensity Level (RIL) has been defined for each RMA. The RIL is based on the land use, recreation, terrestrial and aquatic resources present. As shown in Table 1, the classes that make up this spectrum are differentiated from each other by degree of naturalness, types of social experience, and other considerations. Three RIL classes have been determined to assist in river management -- Low, Medium and High.



Recreation Intensity Level	RMA	Length	Conditions
Low	RMA 1	2.9 miles	high degree of naturalness high quality habitat areas sensitive to human disturbance man-made development rare little on-the-ground evidence of other people high opportunity to experience solitude, closeness to nature, and wildlife education little interaction with other people small party size (1 to 2 persons) few developed access points
Medium	RMA 2 RMA 3	1.5 miles	moderate degree of naturalness moderate to high quality habitat some areas sensitive to human disturbance structures may be present and more highly developed some on-the-ground evidence of other people low to moderate opportunity to experience solitude, closeness to nature moderate to high interaction with other people low to moderate party size expected (<5) moderate level of developed access
High	RMA 4 RMA 5	1.9 miles	very low degree of naturalness low quality habitat few areas sensitive to human disturbance highly developed, numerous structures, urban development obvious on-the-ground evidence of other people very low opportunity to experience solitude, closeness to nature high interaction with other people moderate to large party size expected (greater than 5) numerous developed access points



Policy RE-2. Provide a range of recreational activities that are compatible with the natural environment. Allowable uses are:

- Trail Use
- Swimming
- Watchable Wildlife/Educational Features
- Tubing
- Fishing
- Kayaking
- Canoeing
- Rafting

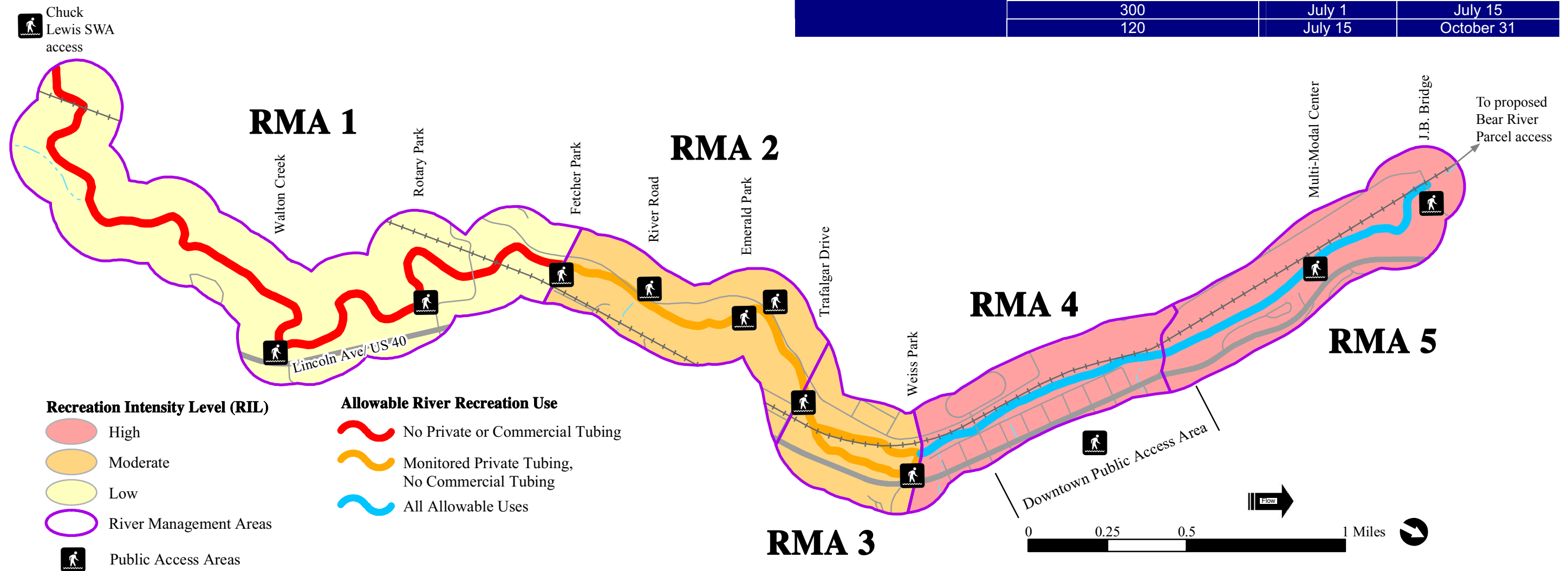
Swimming and fishing should not occur during periods when flows are below the minimum levels shown in Table 2A. Table 2B shows the minimum flows suggested for all floating activities at different time periods. Other uses, including motorized activities, are not allowed.

Table 2A. NON-BOATING YAMPA RIVER RECREATIONAL USES, FLOWS AND PEAK USE PERIODS

	Minimum Flow	Optimal Flow	Start	End
Fishing	70	200	July 1	April 30
Swimming	85	100	July 1	August 15

Table 2B. BOATING YAMPA RIVER RECREATIONAL USES, FLOWS AND PEAK USE PERIODS

	Minimum Flows for Reasonable Recreation Experience (cfs)	Start	End
Recreational boating (kayaking, tubing, canoeing and rafting)	500	April 15	April 30
	800	May 1	May 15
	1200	May 16	May 31
	1700	June 1	June 15
	800	June 16	June 30
	300	July 1	July 15
	120	July 15	October 31





Policy RE-3. Recreational uses should be distributed in a manner that ensures a high quality recreational experience and protects the natural environment.

The distribution of recreational uses should consider existing land use, recreation, terrestrial and aquatic conditions. Table 3 describes acceptable recreational uses by RMA. Activities identified as “allowed, monitor” will be formally monitored to evaluate compliance or specific impacts. In general, all recreational activities in all RMA’s will be monitored to some degree.



Stockbridge multi-modal center

Policy RE-4. Provide appropriate river access.

Recreational uses should use designated public river access points that support permitted recreational uses within each RMA. Acceptable recreational uses by access point are described in Table 4.

Table 3. RECREATION USE BY RMA

River Management Area (RMA)	Recreation Intensity Level	Commercial Tubing	Private Tubing	Swimming	Paddling	Fishing	Education/ Wildlife Viewing
RMA # 1 - Walton Creek	Low	Prohibited	Discouraged	Discouraged	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
RMA # 2 - Fish Creek	Medium	Prohibited	Allowed Monitor	Discouraged	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
RMA # 3 - Snake Island	Medium	Prohibited	Allowed Monitor	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
RMA # 4 - Downtown	High	Allowed Monitor	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
RMA # 5 - Stock Bridge	High	Allowed Monitor	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed

Table 4. RECREATION USE BY ACCESS AREA

Access Areas	Recreation Intensity Level	Commercial Tubing	Private Tubing	Swimming	Paddling	Fishing	Education/ Wildlife Viewing
River Creek Park	Low	Prohibited	Discouraged	Prohibited	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Rotary Park	Low	Prohibited	Discouraged	Prohibited	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Fetcher Park	Medium	Prohibited	Allowed Monitor	Discouraged	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Emerald Park	Medium	Prohibited	Allowed Monitor	Discouraged	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Dr. Rich Weiss Park	Medium	Prohibited	Allowed Monitor	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Downtown Areas	High	Allowed	Allowed Monitor	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
Multi-Modal Center	High	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed
James Brown Bridge	High	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed	Allowed



Policy RE-5. Recreational uses should be managed at sustainable levels that preserve a high quality recreational experience and protect the natural environment.

In the interest of maintaining the health of the river and providing an enjoyable recreational experience for all, commercial river companies will adhere to guidelines outlined in Appendix C. Users of the river should also follow best management practices on the river, including:

- No glass allowed
- No littering
- No Styrofoam coolers
- Respect other river users (i.e. fisherman, kayakers, waders, etc.)
- Respect private property
- Dogs allowed per leash laws
- No alcohol
- Avoid standing or walking on river bed (except fishermen)
- Life jackets, floatation devices and proper footwear recommended
- No bathing or diapers in river



Dr. Rich Weiss Park

Educational programs will serve to provide information to river users and landowners, with a goal of improved safety and environmental and social conditions through increased knowledge of various aspects of river use, requirements and rights.

Policy RE-6. Specific recreational uses on the Yampa River should be managed in a manner that supports the vision and planning objectives.

Tubing – Private tubing is a viable recreational use on the Yampa River, but should not occur in RMA 1. Private tubing use should be monitored to ensure use levels do not affect the recreation experience or natural environment. If private tubing levels exceed indicators, additional RMA’s should be closed to private tubing or numbers of tubers controlled (see Appendix A).



Along core trail in downtown area

Commercial Tubing – Commercial tubing is a viable recreational use on the Yampa River. It should adhere to the commercial operator guidelines presented in Appendix C and the restrictions outlined in Table 5. Restrictions include maximum allowable numbers (i.e. “caps”), timing, tubing colors and types, safety requirements, reporting methods and cleanup requirements. Commercial tubing should not occur in RMA 1, RMA 2 and RMA 3.

	Company	Weekdays	Fridays	Weekend
		Maximum # of Tubes Allowed		
Commercial Tubing/Floatation Device Rental	Backdoor Sports	203	227	440
	Bucking Rainbow	25	35	35
	Blue Sky West	85	100	190
	Lockhart’s	85	100	190
	One Stop Ski Shop	35	38	60
	Totals	433	500	915
Commercial Fishing Guide Services	Fishing guides authorized to provide services on the Yampa River within city limits are presently limited to five (5) as noted below: a. Straightline Sports b. Blue Sky West c. Bucking Rainbow/High Adventures d. Steamboat Fishing Company e. Elk River Outfitters Use limits: Four (4) clients per day on the downtown river corridor. Half-day guide trips will be counted as a full day of usage.			
Kayak Rentals	No limits			
Canoe Rentals	No limits			
Raft Rentals	No limits			
Private Recreation Use	No limits			

Paddling/Rafting – Paddling and rafting activities are viable recreational uses on the Yampa River and are allowed in all RMA’s. All companies offering boat rentals and/or guided float trips are required to obtain permits through the City that regulate boat sizes as a function of flow (see Appendix B). Use (private or commercial) should be monitored and adhere to best management practices, including:

- Use only designated put-ins and take-outs
- Observing minimum flow requirements for boat size
- “No trace” boating practices

Swimming – Swimming is a viable recreational activity in the Yampa River. No swimming should occur in RMA 1 or RMA 2. Overall use should be monitored and adhere to best management practices, such as not introducing sun block oils into the river and not swimming when water levels are low enough to stress fish populations.

Fishing – Fishing should be allowed in all RMA’s. Use should be monitored and adhere to best management practices to protect this blue ribbon fishery. All state fishing regulations should be followed. Fish should be played and released as quickly as possible. Catch and release BMP’s should be followed (e.g., play fish quickly, wet hand before touching, etc.) to minimize trauma to fish. All commercial fishing guides should adhere to requirements outlined in Appendix C. Applicable possession regulations within the study area are:



- Downstream of Stagecoach Dam 0.6 miles to Walton Creek (excluding Catamount Lake). Artificial flies and lures only and a bag and possession limit of two trout.
- Walton Creek downstream 4.8 miles to the James Brown (Soul Center of Universe) bridge in Steamboat springs. Artificial flies and lures only and all trout upon being caught must be immediately released into the water.

Policy RE-7. River access fees.

All commercial users of public access points for the Yampa River within the city limits are presently required by City ordinance to pay a permit fee and monthly use fee. These fees go into a dedicated account for river improvements, subject to direction from the Trails & River Committee and commercial operators. The monthly use fee is 5% of gross revenues derived from the rental of floatation devices or other river recreational equipment. This fee should be reviewed periodically and adjusted as necessary to ensure reasonable returns for use of public resources/facilities.

Calculation of the fee amount is straight forward for commercial businesses that simply rent floatation devices (e.g. tubes or kayaks) but less clear for those businesses that also provide guide or instruction services, such as for fishing, rafting, or kayak lessons. Each commercial operator assigns an assumed value for the equipment rental portion of the total guiding fee, or lesson, and then pays 5% of that amount, not of the total fee. This has led to considerable discrepancies among companies as to what portion of their fees accurately reflect the equipment rental cost (e.g. how much is the rental of a fly rod worth, or 1/6th of a raft?) and is very difficult to monitor. In order to level the playing field among commercial operators, make it simpler for permittees to calculate and City Staff to administer, and provide a reasonable amount of revenues for future river work, the fees should be based on 5% of a business' revenues derived from river recreation, whether it be tubing, rafting, canoe lessons, guided fishing, etc.

At present, there are no fees for private use of the river but it might be an appropriate tool for future management if recreation use levels continue to increase and adequate funds for river protection and improvement are not available elsewhere (e.g. City budget).

Land Use (LU)

Principle LU. Recreational uses should be managed in a manner compatible with adjacent land uses.

Policy LU-1. Recreational users should adhere to the two quiet zones and other regulations in order to reduce conflicts with adjacent property owners.

Users should be informed about the two quiet zones adjacent to the mobile home parks along the river. Attractive and clear signage should be posted to remind users of these areas and where private property is located.



Canoers below Snake Island foot bridge

Policy LU-2. Access points are a primary management tool for the river.

Access points should be used as a tool to control the types and levels of use on the river. Access point signage should be installed and/or modified to reflect current management restrictions. New facilities constructed at these access points should be in conformance with the recreation intensity level (RIL) previously described. Access points should provide signage and other exhibits to educate users on the best management practices on the river.

Aside from the Bear River Parcel and River Creek Park (aka 'Polumbus Property'), both of which are in the planning stages, no new river access points should be constructed. Parking should be limited to designated areas and users should adhere to parking restrictions. A viable shuttle system should be developed to encourage users to use exterior parking lots, such as Stockbridge multi-modal center. The shuttle system should be used to direct activities to suitable access points and RMA's.



Policy LU-3. A limited amount of on-river signage will be added to the river corridor to support management activities and goals.

A unified signage system and kiosks will be designed in an unobtrusive yet effective manner to identify legal put-ins and takeouts, toilets, and quiet zones. Interpretive signs will provide information on cultural and natural resources. Standardized information kiosks using existing designs will provide safety and orientation materials.



Signage Design

Kiosk Design

Policy LU-4. Remaining elements of the core river trail should be constructed in an environmentally friendly manner.

Where possible, existing trail segments should be relocated and future trail segments situated away from sensitive environmental resources, including the Yampa River, except where such access might be useful to support public education efforts and consultation with CDOW has occurred, such as the proposed boardwalk in Rotary Park.

Aquatic Habitat (AH) 

Principle AH. Aquatic habitat should be improved and enhanced.

Policy AH-1. Fish habitat management will be coordinated with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW).

CDOW efforts to improve the fisheries should be supported, including fish stocking or removal, habitat improvements and whirling disease control programs.

Policy AH-2. Aquatic habitat will be improved to enhance fisheries.

While the Yampa River supports a healthy fishery, aquatic habitat improvements to the river should continue, including riparian enhancements and new structures. These improvements should be targeted to improve the aquatic environment for trout without harming native fish or dynamic river functions. Improvements could address the following conditions:

- Water depth
- Water velocities
- Percent overhead cover, shading
- Pool/riffle composition
- Stream temperature
- Bed material composition



View of "D Hole" and West Lincoln Park

Where possible, aquatic habitat enhancements to the river should serve multiple goals, including improving the recreational experience of paddlers, tubers and fishermen. Improvements to the river should be natural in appearance and in character with the surrounding environment.

Policy AH-3. Protection of the aquatic habitat and trout fishery should be the highest priority. If one or more resource protection triggers are met, the Yampa River may be closed to certain recreational users, based on consultation with CDOW staff.

Triggers include:

- Water temperatures exceeding 75°F for two or more consecutive days
- Dissolved oxygen (D.O.) levels average less than 6.0 mg/l
- Flows less than 85 cfs.



Policy AH-4. Maintain or improve the existing water quality for fisheries, aesthetics and other ecological considerations.

Give priority to protection of water quality in cases of conflict with other resource uses. Prevent alteration of natural channels or stream banks that would negatively affect the free flow of water, overbank flows, the appearance of the stream, fish habitat or water quality.

The City will ensure that surface waters are protected from degradation and are of a high quality. State and federal regulations provide the primary framework for protecting water quality from further degradation. However, local governments can play an important role in controlling potential pollution sources, monitoring water quality and assuring that adopted regulations are adequately enforced. In addition, a number of natural springs occur throughout the community. These resources should be protected even though they may contribute to water quality degradation in the Yampa.

Policy AH-5: Preserve existing stream flows.

Efforts to maintain an adequate amount of water in the river are fundamental to the achievement of water quality, ecological health and other resource protection goals. Toward this end, the City should obtain a Recreational Channel Diversion (RICD) water right to protect against future appropriations that might diminish the river flows needed to provide a reasonable recreation experience at the location of the City's in-channel diversion structures. Funds should be allocated in the City's 5-Year Capital Improvement Program for this purpose. In addition, consideration should be given to asking the Colorado Water Conservation Board to seek a Minimum In-Stream Flow (MISF) to provide the minimum flows necessary to support the biological integrity of the Yampa River throughout its entire reach through the City.

Policy AH-6: Consider obtaining other water supplies.

The City presently owns about 350 acre-feet of water in Stagecoach Reservoir that is dedicated to municipal use. Additional water storage possibilities and the acquisition of more senior water rights from willing sellers should be pursued.

Policy AH-7: Provide greater protection of the River through more restrictive floodplain regulations.

Consistent with the update of the City of Steamboat Springs Community Plan and policies developed by the Planning Department, the City will discourage future development from occurring in identified floodplains through more restrictive floodplain regulations, in order to reduce hazards and protect water quality and riparian areas.

Policy AH-8: Enforce stormwater management regulations.

Actively enforce stormwater management regulations, including erosion from construction sites and from improperly located snow storage areas. Move quickly to implement the control and educational measures described in the City's Phase 2 Stormwater permit application, such as reducing sedimentation to the Yampa.

Terrestrial Habitat (TH) 

Principle TH. Terrestrial habitat should be improved and enhanced.

Policy TH-1. Provide large contiguous areas adjacent to the river, free of human disturbance.

Efforts should be made to control and discourage the presence of visitors to key parcels adjacent to the river. By reducing accessibility and closing key parcels to people, critical wildlife habitats will be protected.

Policy TH-2. Additional open lands and natural areas should be protected.

The city should purchase additional lands and/or pursue GOCO and other grant opportunities to acquire conservation easements or other agreements with interested landowners. Specific properties for potential acquisition in the near future have been identified by the CAC.

Policy TH-3. Manage vegetation to protect and enhance the natural habitat of the river, placing special emphasis on protecting native riparian and wetland vegetation.

Some of the most productive and diverse habitats are the cottonwood and willow-dominated riparian areas along the Yampa River. These riparian areas provide habitat for a large number and diversity of wildlife species, and many wildlife species depend either entirely or significantly on the availability and quality of these habitats for their necessary life cycles, specifically dietary and reproductive specialization. Many of these habitats include a mix of woodland, shrub and grassland riparian communities. They also absorb and filter runoff, attenuate overbank flows and maintain river channel stability. This mosaic should be preserved and enhanced through additional river restoration projects.

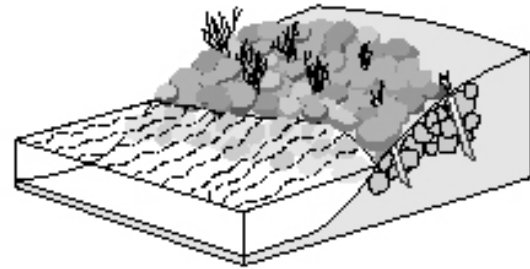
Cottonwood communities are some of the most important habitat. Recruitment among these stands should be carefully monitored. To ensure the future health of this natural system, there should be no net loss of riparian habitat (including wetlands) as a result of development in the study area.

Every effort should be made to ensure that riverbank restoration or stabilization projects use BMP's, such as those shown.



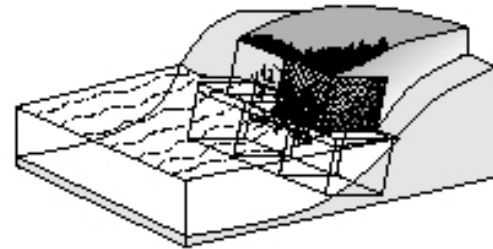
EXAMPLES OF BANK STABILIZATION BMP'S

Joint Plantings



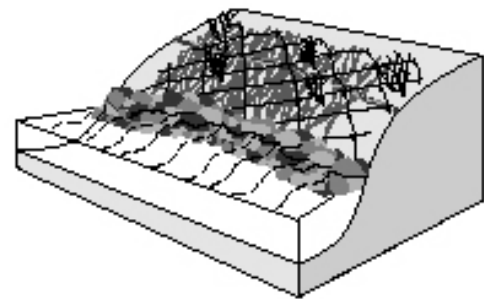
Live stakes tamped into joints or openings between rock which have previously been installed on a slope or while rock is being placed on the slope face.

Vegetated Gabions



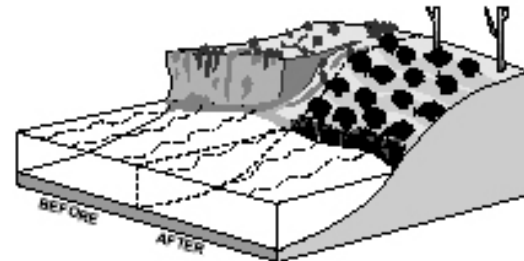
Wire-mesh, rectangular baskets filled with small to medium size rock and soil and laced together to form a structural toe or sidewall. Live branch cuttings are placed on each consecutive layer between the rock filled baskets to take root, consolidate the structure, and bind it to the slope.

Brush Mattresses



Combination of live stakes, live facines, and branch cuttings installed to cover and physically protect streambanks; eventually to sprout and establish numerous individual plants.

Bank Shaping and Planting



Regrading streambanks to a stable slope, placing topsoil and other materials needed for sustaining plant growth, and selecting, installing and establishing appropriate plant species.

Source: USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Stream Corridor Restoration, NTIS Order no. PB98-502487

Policy TH-4. Provide buffers from development to protect terrestrial and aquatic resources.

Consistent with the update of the City of Steamboat Springs Comprehensive Plan and policies developed by the Planning Department, the minimum setback for any resource from the natural feature should be between 100-300 feet. A buffer distance of up to 1/4 mile should be used around sensitive wildlife resources, such as nesting areas. In order to provide an appropriate level of flexibility and recognition of situations where lot size or other considerations create special circumstances, the regulations should allow exceptions to these minimum setbacks. The exceptions would be performance based, i.e., in return for restoration of other important riparian habitat or other appropriate conservation efforts, the minimum setback could be adjusted on a case-by-case basis. The net result should be no loss of sensitive natural features, including but not limited to the following: floodplains, wetlands, riparian habitats, critical wildlife habitats and threatened and endangered species habitats.



Children playing in hot springs outflow at Dr. Rich Weiss Park

Policy TH-5. Encourage non-regulatory approaches.

In addition to enhanced regulatory tools, the community will undertake a series of efforts that promote conservation of riparian systems. Some of these efforts are ongoing, such as the promotion of voluntary efforts to conserve lands through donation of conservation easements or other means that can take advantage of tax credits or provide other incentives to landowners. Other strategies focus on educational programs that emphasize the importance of protecting riparian resources, programs that should be directed at river users as well as landowners.

Policy TH-6. Remove invasive vegetation.

Noxious weeds are found along the Yampa River within the City. Compounding the problem is the ease with which noxious weeds can be dispersed along the river. Recreational users, dogs, the use of a network of informal trails, livestock, wildlife, and normal water flow patterns disperse many weeds along the river.

Invasive vegetation in the riparian areas should be monitored and controlled. Given the scarcity of resources, it will be necessary to implement a phased, ongoing, integrated weed management program. To help slow dispersal of invasive weeds until the program can be implemented, a weed education program should be implemented immediately focusing on ways visitors and adjacent property owners can help manage weeds along the river.