

# North Forty News

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LaPorte, CO • March 2, 2012

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## County institutes fresh plan for grazing on open lands

by DAN MACARTHUR on FEBRUARY 29, 2012 · LEAVE A COMMENT · IN DISPATCHES

LaRimer County is taking a new approach to leasing its open space properties in an effort to raise additional revenues, increase public accessibility, promote competition and encourage creative new uses of the land.

Beginning in January, those holding leases on three county grazing properties are paying more and committed to a five-year lease. Previously leases were renewed annually.

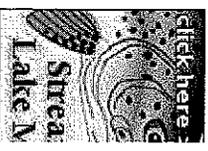
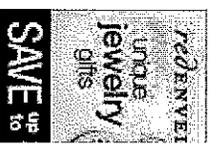
The county made the grazing permit process competitive, in part to realize greater revenues to offset management costs. The change resulted in dramatically increased rates, although Charlie Gindler, a resources specialist in the LaRimer County Natural Resources Department, said it's not yet clear how much in additional proceeds will be realized due to variations in grazing activity.

Previously the county earned \$10,78 per animal unit month for each of the three grazing properties. The AUM represents the amount of forage required each month to support an "animal unit" as determined by weight and type.

Through competitive bidding, the county in 2012 will receive \$20.50 for each of the 1,300 AUMs at Red Mountain Open Space; \$18 for each of the 120 AUMs at the North Property north of Wellington; and \$15 for the 144 AUMs at Eagles Nest Open Space.

The change also opens up the possibility of eventually allowing cultivation of genetically modified (GMO) crops on two other county-owned or -managed agricultural properties. The issue was a matter of contentious debate in bordering Boulder County, where county commissioners approved conditional use of GMOs on county-owned property.

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MAR 2 Fri	9:30 am Knit & Stitch
MAR 3 Sat	9:00 am Public forum on new stadium
	12:00 pm Public forum on new stadium
	5:30 pm Whiskers 'n Wine Jubilee: The Whiskers of Oz
	6:30 pm Reed Foehl at the Ball March 3

View

### LATEST CLASSIFIEDS

- GRASS HAY HORSE QUALITY
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The GMO issue is unlikely to appear on the radar here anytime soon. Grindler said there have been no GMO proposals — either in favor or against — in Larimer County and no need now to establish a process for dealing with them. He noted that Boulder County owns far more land suitable for cultivation than Larimer County does.

Business  
Comedy  
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Education /  
Schools

"I don't think we would address that unless it comes up. I think we'd do that on a case-by-case basis," said Grindler, also a rancher and longtime county liaison to the citizen Agricultural Advisory Board.

Schools  
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**County ag lands**  
Larimer County owns two properties suitable for grazing and recreational use — the 14,000-acre Red Mountain and the 640-acre Eagles Nest.

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There is no public access to the 640-acre North Property parcel, originally purchased by the county Solid Waste department as a potential site for a future landfill. It is now dedicated solely to grazing.

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The county also manages two agricultural properties. It owns the 160-acre River Bluffs site east of Interstate 25 between Timnath and Windsor, which produces grass and alfalfa for hay and grazing, with limited recreational use. The 575-acre Long View Farm Open Space west of US Highway 287 between Loveland and Fort Collins, is owned jointly with the two cities. Long View is dedicated to dryland wheat production with no public access.

#### EXTRAS

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The competitive process did not however attract any new grazing lessees. They remain the same as before: Eldon Ackerman at Red Mountain, Jeff and Janeen Weller at Eagles Nest, and Lynn Downey at the North Property.

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Grindler said the county will conduct a similar competitive process this year in setting new five-year leases for the Long View and River Bluffs properties beginning in 2013.

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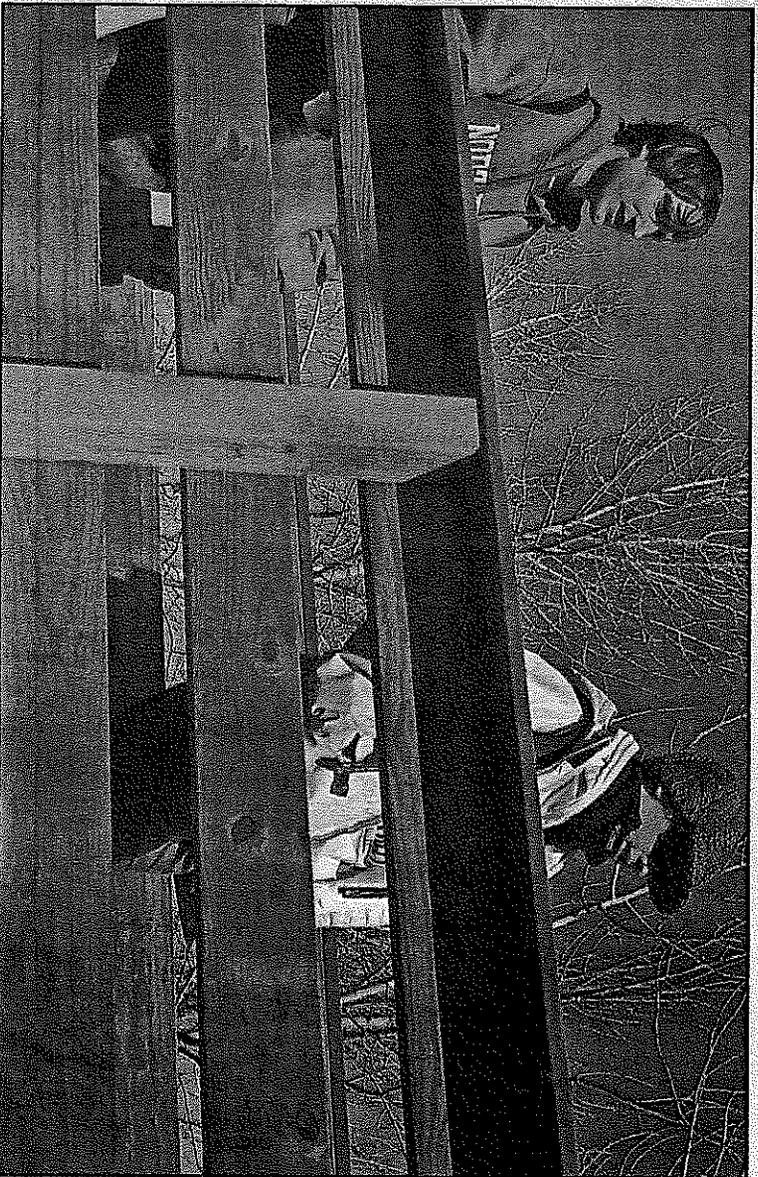
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## WHIPPING WINTER WINDS CONTINUE



Reporter-Herald/MADELINE NOVNEY

Coty Dennis of Greeley, left, and his girlfriend, Madeleine Hartley of Denver, brave whipping winds as they cross a bridge Sunday afternoon on their way back to the parking lot after a hike at Devil's Backbone Open Space west of Loveland. Hartley accompanied Dennis on the expedition, an assignment for his hiking class at the University of Northern Colorado. In their brief travels Sunday, the couple discovered that a person can hike the trail system from Devil's Backbone to Horsetooth Reservoir. "(Coty) doesn't know it yet, but we're going to be doing that," Hartley said, joking. Sunday boasted highs in the 30s with wind speeds between 35 and 45 mph, according to Northern Colorado 5 chief meteorologist Chris Yates. Rain and snow showers are possible this afternoon with temperatures dropping into the mid 20s, Yates said.

Ref-HERALD 8-27-12

In Brief

## Donor of ranch to CSU, UW expresses regret

By Mead Gruver  
The Associated Press

HORSE CREEK, WYO. — A woman who donated her family's ranch to promote hands-on agriculture education at the University of Wyoming and Colorado State University says she's disappointed that the two schools haven't made better use of her gift as a teaching tool.

Now the universities are preparing to sell the Y Cross Ranch, and Amy Davis says if she had it to do all over again, she wouldn't have donated the vast property between Cheyenne and Laramie in southeast Wyoming.

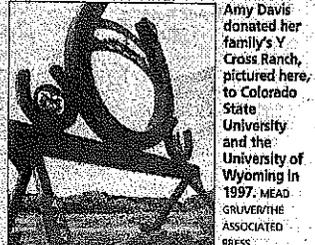
"I don't think they've taken advantage in the last 14 years of what this ranch

opportunity should have given to the students," Davis told The Associated Press in an interview.

Rising up from grassy plains into the woods and meadows of the Laramie Mountains, the Y Cross is bigger than the country of Lichtenstein — about 50,000 acres, or 78 square miles. Colorado State and the

University of Wyoming have been contemplating selling the ranch between Cheyenne and Laramie for a year or more. Their option to sell under the terms of the 1997 gift agreement between the universities and Davis' Courtenay C. Davis Foundation opened up in September.

See RANCH, Page A2



Amy Davis donated her family's Y Cross Ranch, pictured here, to Colorado State University and the University of Wyoming in 1997. MEAD GRUVER/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Ranch

Continued from Page A1

What happens next will no doubt be of keen interest to Colorado and Wyoming ranchers who follow big ranch sales and worry about educating future generations for their industry, which sorely needs young blood.

Davis also expressed worry that the University of Wyoming Foundation and Colorado State University Research Foundation might be about to rush through the sale without advertising the ranch on the real estate market long enough to attract the highest possible bidders.

Not so, said Kathleen Heary, president and chief executive officer of the foundation at Colorado State. She promised that the sale process would be structured so that the two schools are able to scout for as many potential buyers as possible.

"We will have a very deliberate, open process and we are going to cast the net as broadly as possible and take the time that it takes to cast that net," she said.

The schools plan to begin marketing the ranch this spring. A sealed-bid sale could occur as soon as this fall but could be postponed another year if the property doesn't generate sufficient interest this summer, said Ben Blalock, president of the University of Wyoming Foundation.

"We're under no sort of time pressure here at all," Blalock

said. "The commitment we have to those schools is we are going to bring the best value."

As for whether the schools have fully utilized the Y Cross as an educational tool, Henry said Colorado State uses other properties for hands-on agricultural education that are much closer to Fort Collins than the Y Cross.

Blalock said the Y Cross has hosted one or two interns each summer, though not every summer from the University of Wyoming. The ranch also has hosted students in an agriculture class and provided a site for research into rangeland weeds and cattle weight gain, said Francis Galey, dean of the College of Agriculture at the University of Wyoming.

Galey acknowledged that the Y Cross hasn't received a lot of use for teaching. He called it a wonderful asset but said the emphasis on keeping it a working ranch has made it a difficult location to host students and hold classes.

An endowment set up from the proceeds of the ranch sale could do a lot more good for agriculture education by funding scholarships at the two schools than what the Y Cross has been able to support to date, he said.

The property evidently has the interest of at least one neighboring landowner, Doug Samuelson, a former Wyoming state legislator whose close relatives are major donors to the University of Wyoming. Last year the university explored a possible land swap involving the Y Cross and some land east

of Laramie owned by Samuelson's Warren Livestock LLC.

The University of Wyoming Foundation gave up on the swap idea in September, saying it wouldn't have been compatible with the gift agreement.

The University of Wyoming received an unsolicited bid for the Y Cross in February 2010. Blalock said he didn't remember who it came from or what the amount was, but the schools weren't interested in selling except through an open process.

He said an appraiser has been assessing the value of the Y Cross but has not yet determined the value of the mineral rights underlying the property.

A Nature Conservancy conservation easement — the organization's largest in Wyoming — was established on the ranch around the time of the gift and generally prohibits new development on the ranch beyond its existing structures and roads. The easement also prohibits splitting up the ranch, according to the conservancy.

"Whether or not the universities own the land, it's going to be protected by the easement and we'll work with the owners, whoever they are," said Andrea Erickson-Culero,

Wyoming director for The Nature Conservancy.

Davis spent part of her young life on the Y Cross and now lives in Denver.

The estimated value of the Y Cross at the time of the gift, according to Davis, was \$8.4 million. She estimates its value at between \$20 million and \$30 million now.

The gift agreement allowed either university to buy out the other for half of the 1997 value. In 2009, Davis offered to help Colorado State buy out the University of Wyoming but the University of Wyoming was unwilling to sell, according to Henry at Colorado State.

The gift agreement specified that the ranch was to be used to "provide a real world working laboratory" for students to learn about Western ranching and resource management. The ranch also is supposed to generate income for internships and scholarships. It has provided a total of \$12,750 for perhaps a dozen scholarships over the years, according to Blalock.

Davis said the University of Wyoming and Colorado State University shouldn't expect to just teach ranching by the book — the business is too complicated for that.

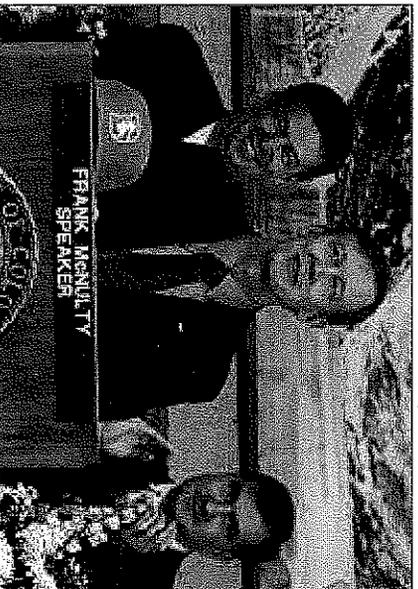
"They've neglected a great opportunity," she said.

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**The Spot — Blogs — The Denver Post**

JANUARY 30, 2012, 1:40 PM

## Colorado College poll: Coloradans give Hickenlooper, conservation high marks

By **TIM HOOVER** |  9 Comments

[1] Denver Post/file photo

Hickenlooper: As popular as clean air and water?

Another poll shows Gov. John Hickenlooper [2] with high approval ratings, this time ranking him among the most popular governors in the Mountain West.

The State of the Rockies Conservation in the West poll [3], commissioned by Colorado College [4], surveyed 2,400 registered voters in Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming, Montana and Utah. It showed Hickenlooper's approval rating among Coloradans at 67 percent — the same percentage of voters who identify themselves as conservationists.

Meanwhile, Hickenlooper's disapproval rating was only at 19 percent, a 48-point spread between overall approval and disapproval that put him in third place for popularity among Mountain West governors, behind Utah Gov. Gary Herbert [5], who had a 51-point spread, and Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead [6], who had a seemingly bullet-proof 66-point spread.

Other polls in recent months [7] have shown Hickenlooper, a Democrat, to be among the most popular governors in the nation.

Colorado voters also continue to show themselves, like most voters in the Mountain West, to be independent-minded. Only 28 percent of Colorado voters said they were supporters of the Tea Party [8], while 66 percent said they weren't. Meanwhile, only 26 percent said they were Occupy Wall Street supporters, while 67 percent said they weren't.

At the same time, 36 percent said they watched mainstream news outlets like ABC, NBC and CBS, while 23 percent said they watched FOX news, 7 percent said they watched CNN and 9 percent said they watched MSNBC.

The poll also showed that 34 percent of respondents were registered as Democrats, 34 percent were

registered as Republicans and 30 percent were unaffiliated.

Other findings from the poll showed:

- 78 percent of Coloradans said that the state can protect land and water and have a strong economy at the same time.
- 93 percent agreed that, “Our national parks, forests, monuments, and wildlife areas are an essential part of Colorado’s economy.”
- 63 percent of Colorado voters view environmental laws more as “important safeguards to protect private property owners, public health and taxpayers from toxic pollution and costly clean-ups” while 29 percent see them as “burdensome regulations that tie up industry in red tape, hurt them too much financially, and cost jobs.”
- 75 percent say Colorado should maintain protections for land, air and water in the state rather than reduce them in an effort to create jobs as quickly as possible.
- Only 34 percent said that, “One of the best ways to create jobs is to cut back environmental regulations that are weighing down Colorado’s businesses.”
- 71 percent support the EPA “continuing to implement the Clean Air Act by updating the standards for air quality, including for smog, dust, and emissions from power plants, factories and cars.”

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<http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/2012/01/30/colorado-college-poll-coloradans-give-hickenlooper-conservation-high-marks/56942/>

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- [1] Image: <http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/2012/01/30/colorado-college-poll-coloradans-give-hickenlooper-conservation-high-marks/56942/john-hickenlooper-frank-mcnullty-brandon-shaffer-2/>
- [2] Gov. John Hickenlooper: <http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/topic/gov-john-hickenlooper/>
- [3] State of the Rockies Conservation in the West poll: <http://www2.coloradocollege.edu/StateoftheRockies/>
- [4] Colorado College: <http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/topic/colorado-college/>
- [5] Utah Gov. Gary Herbert: <http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/topic/utah-gov-gary-herbert/>
- [6] Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead: <http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/topic/wyoming-gov-matt-mead/>
- [7] Other polls in recent months: <http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/2011/12/14/poll-hickenlooper-job-approval-59/49926/>
- [8] Tea Party: <http://blogs.denverpost.com/thespot/topic/tea-party/>

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## Fort Collins natural area management growing, changing two decades later

They stretch from the 12-acre Gustav Swanson Natural Area near downtown Fort Collins, where the homeless sometime sleep, to the 18,000-acre Soapstone Prairie Natural Area where the lonesome high plains fade into Wyoming.

This year marks the 20-year anniversary of Fort Collins voters first passing the city's quarter-cent sales tax dedicated to the purchase of natural areas. Some of those purchases came with little fanfare, some came much to the agreement of many and still others rivaled the contentiousness of City Council elections.

Love them, hate them or don't even know we had them, the 43 natural areas encompassing more than 36,000 acres have become a thread in the fabric of life in the area.

A recently released survey mailed randomly to residents by the recently renamed Fort Collins Natural Areas Department, revealed:

- » 80 percent of respondents had visited a natural area in the past year;
- » 90 percent felt the department did a

good or better job of managing them;

» 33 percent were familiar with the Fort Collins Natural Areas Department;

» 53 percent were familiar that the city even managed natural areas;

Count Sara Halac as one of those Fort Collins residents who loves the natural areas.

The 51-year-old, who lives near Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area in south Fort Collins, said she can be found nearly every day at the natural area that protects 1,100 acres of shortgrass prairie on the edge of Fort Collins. The 25-year Fort Collins resident said she uses the natural area to walk her dogs, run, bike and inline skate.

"Oh my gosh, I'm so glad to have the natural area so close to my house," she said. "Having natural areas in the city is the best of both worlds. We live in a beautiful city and you can also experience nature and feel like you're far away from the

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people and the traffic. I've seen mountain lion, coyotes, deer and, of course, snakes at the natural area. We are truly blessed to have such an opportunity so close to us."

John Knezovich, a certified public accountant and former Fort Collins mayor, opposed the tax 20 years ago. But he said his opposition to the tax has subsided.

"Now that I have the perspective of 20 years and the projects on which they spent the money, I would say that Fort Collins is a better community because of the money they have devoted to this," he said. "I would be willing to vote for a continuation of the quarter-cent sales tax, but not for adding another quarter-cent on the existing tax."

The current city tax runs through 2030.

## Change of scenery

Ten years after first passing the tax, city natural areas accounted for 8,634 acres. Since then, nearly 28,000 acres have been acquired, with Soapstone making up 64 percent of the acreage. To protect the land and enhance the experience of users, the city hired two rangers in 1997, and the force has grown to six.

But times are changing for the department, said John Stokes, who oversees the department.

Whereas 70 percent of revenue was spent on land and water conservation through purchases and easements and 30 percent

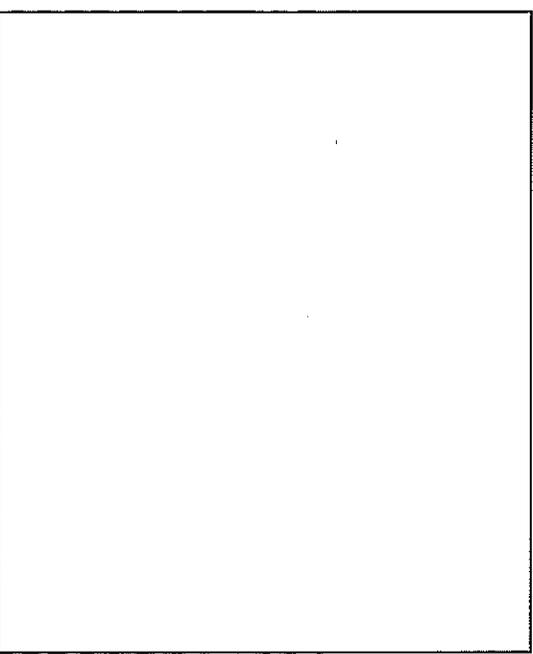
on operation and management the first 18 years of the tax, he said, the reverse is now true.

"We have really flipped the paradigm," Stokes said. "We are doing some land conservation, mainly tending to more conservation easements than purchases, and know that we now must spend more on operating and managing those lands. We want to make sure we are good stewards of the land."

The city's natural areas aren't all located in the city. Larger parcels are found in the foothills, including Coyote Ridge, Bobcat Ridge and Soapstone. Smaller ones dot either side of the Poudre River and along the city's trail system as they wind through Fort Collins. Those allow for various forms of recreation.

Still, other natural area management areas between Fort Collins and Loveland and Fort Collins and Wellington serve as buffers and allow farming but no recreation or access by the general public.

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Stokes said the Natural Areas Department's main focus for land conservation includes the area between Wellington and Fort Collins and along the Poudre River. To that end, Stokes, who has been director of the city's Natural Resources Department since 2003, will take on a new role as the Poudre River sustainability director, serving as the point person for the river.

Issues he expects to work on in that role include restoration efforts, recreation opportunities, floodplain regulations and long-range water storage projects, such as the controversial Northern Integrated Supply Project and Glade Reservoir. Last year, the Natural Areas Department completed a deal to place conservation easements on 900 acres of farmland owned by Albert, Bob, Brian and Jason Kraft between Wellington and Fort Collins as a community separator. The total cost was \$1.2 million. The deal allows the land to stay in farming but restricts building on it and does not allow recreation or general public access.

"We don't need or want to own that land; it needs to be kept in the private sector," Stokes said. "It has some of the highest scores for good soils in the county so it needs to stay in farming, which helps us keep it from being developed. That's the direction we're going."

Stokes said the city will still look at purchasing outright some properties but those likely would be small, key parcels.

Knezovich said he does oppose

conservation easements, questioning why the city would spend taxpayer money on farmers who keep land undeveloped for free.

"Sometimes, we spend money on the wrong things because we have a convenient source of revenue," Knezovich said.

"Conservation easements are a convenient excuse to set aside some properties like near Wellington where there is no other financial resource."

Stokes' focus on the Poudre River corridor has already started with the renovation of the Poudre River at the city-managed McMurry Ponds Natural Area between Shields Street and College Avenue on the north side of the river.

The two-year, \$600,000 project will remove riprap, change the riverbank so that some water can flow out of the banks to create a wetland and revegetation of the area in native plants.

Stokes said it's the beginning of what he hopes will be a rejuvenation of the Poudre

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River corridor through Fort Collins that will result in enhanced recreation, wildlife habitat and connections to the downtown area for the growing number of people who are drawn to the river.

He said those visitor numbers will grow due to the Fort Collins Museum and Science Discovery Center, which expects to open in late summer at Cherry Street and College Avenue, and building out of the Mason Street transportation corridor.

"It's going to take big bucks to undo turning our back on the river for the past 100 years," Stokes said. "We have used the river as an industrial dumping ground, farming has had an affect on it and so has gravel mining, which has created some negative impacts some of which aren't as bad and can be remedied but others that are difficult to remedy. Plus, recreation has taken a toll on it.

"It's fabulous to bring people to the river, but we want to make sure that we can provide infrastructure so that all those people can enjoy it in a way that does not harm the river."

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