SOURCEBOOK: South Platte River Youth Advisory Council

Prepared for the Metro Denver Nature Alliance (Metro DNA) and all those who benefit from the South Platte River

TRIO Upward Bound 2019 Summer Program
Colorado State University
July 2019
Executive Summary

The Youth Advisory Council for the South Platte River originated in the TRIO Upward Bound 2019 summer program run by Colorado State University. This council consists of culturally diverse seniors and juniors from Denver Public Schools: Bruce Randolph High School, John F. Kennedy High School, and Abraham Lincoln High School, who want to advocate for the restoration and maintenance of the South Platte River.

The South Platte influences a large portion of the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods, where most of these students live. The goal of these students is to advise as many stakeholders as possible, such as government figures, local community members, and educational figures to learn from the past, join the environmental cause, and take action now to ensure a healthy future. These students are starting up locally, by economically and culturally uplifting minority groups and individuals who normally don’t get the choice to vote for environmental issues like this one.
The South Platte River is one of the two principal tributaries of the Platte River. The river serves as one of the principal sources of water for the Front Range of Colorado. The river covers 439 miles, and provides water to everyone in the watershed, including wildlife, agriculture, and the cities of Denver, Greeley, North Platte, Ogalalla, Cheyenne, Fort Morgan, Sterling, Fort Lupton, Brighton, and Brush.

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1. Introduction

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As the years go by, these young advocates hope to inspire large crowds to make their movement a national phenomenon that could potentially resolve water conflicts and preserve this finite resource that becomes more sacred each day.

Figure 2: The South Platte influences a large portion of the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods, where many of the student authors of this Sourcebook live. (Photo: Flickr, Mr. TinDC)
In partnership with our community and others we can rejuvenate the health of South Platte River. Increasing both money and people resources would positively impact the river. This work would serve the river by helping to make it swimmable, fishable, and drinkable in a healthy way.

We made decisions and deliberated as if we were the South Platte Youth Advisory Council. Accordingly, as the South Platte Youth Advisory Council we propose and identify the following:

**Mission Statement**
Empower our community to heal past generations, provide for present generations, and ensure the livelihood of future generations by protecting the health of the South Platte River.

**Motto**
Learn with us. Clean with us. Save with us.

**Stakeholders of the South Platte River**
- Denver Parks and Recreation
- City and County of Denver
- Globeville and Elyria-Swansea Neighborhood
- Denver Water
- Denver Public Schools
- Waste Water Treatment Plant
- Residents
- Colorado State University
- Homeless population
- Industry (Purina Dog Chow plant and others)
- National Western Center
- News/Media
- Wildlife
- Colorado Department of Transportation
- Stockshow
- Libraries

**Priority Stakeholders**
- Globeville and Elyria-Swansea Residents
- Denver Water
- Denver Public Schools
- Residents (General)
- City and County of Denver
- Colorado State University
- National Western Center
- Wildlife

**Present Issues in the South Platte River**
- Contamination - pollution, trash, E. coli, smell
- Habitat loss - aquatic insects and fish (temp, oxygen)
- Impervious surfaces - polluted stormwater
- Neglect - political, communal, commercial, biological, tourism/recreation, economic, resources
- Lack of education and public knowledge; Lack of funds for education
- Lack of interest - disconnect between nature and individuals
- Vulnerable community - gentrification, industrialization, lack of resources

*Figure 3: The South Platte River provides diverse opportunities for people, including fishing.*

*Figure 4: Stakeholder influence and potential relevance and impact on the proposed Youth Advisory Council for the South Platte River. While wildlife have great relevance to the proposed effort, they have little influence over it. While CSU and the National Western Center also have considerable relevance, on the other hand they have greater potential influence. (Source: TRIO Upward Bound 2019 Summer Program)*
2. Values and Guiding Principles

The proposed Youth Advisory Council for the South Platte River addresses the following values:

- Climate Action and Responsibility
- Health of the River
- Diverse Voices & Communities
- Authentic Partnerships

**Value: Health of the River**

Problem: Pollution and overexploitation of the South Platte River has compromised many habitats that the river provides. This affects plants, aquatic organisms, terrestrial animals, microbes, and even humans.

Guiding Principles:

- Develop a shared vision of a healthy South Platte River
- Commit to making the South Platte River swimable and fishable
- Advocate for change through inter-generational public education

**Value: Climate Action and Responsibility**

Problem: The amount of water available to us will decrease significantly in the coming years due to decreased snowpack and altered weather patterns. This will impact human, animal, plant, and environmental health.

Guiding Principles:

- Increase reforestation
- Prioritize water efficiency and conservation
- Advance corporate responsibility
- Reduce waste going into the river

* Figure 5: The river’s problems affect plants, aquatic organisms, terrestrial animals, microbes, and even humans

* Figure 6: The river’s problems affect plants, aquatic organisms, terrestrial animals, microbes, and even humans

* Figure 6: South Platte River Trail—Developing a shared vision of a healthy South Platte River could help make it swimable and fishable (Photo: Flickr, Susan Smith, NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0])

* Figure 7: The amount of water available in the river in the future will impact wildlife, like this female American kestrel getting ready to fly (Photo: Flickr, Tony’s Takes, NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0])

* Figure 8: Reducing waste going into the river is an important aspect of taking responsibility and increasing the enjoyment of the river (Photo: Flickr, Rasherin, NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0])
Value: Authentic and Symbiotic Partnerships
Problem: The communities, committees, and decision-making bodies that are trying to heal the South Platte River are not connected. This lack of collaboration promotes personal agendas and prevents mutual understanding. Money has become more valuable than the environment to the people who have the power to fix this issue.

Guiding Principles
- Use a unified effort in healing the South Platte. We are all in this together
- Be responsible and accountable
- Understand that we are all equal, regardless of different capacities and influences

Value: Diverse Voices & Communities
Problem: Ignored communities have long been denied a voice regarding environmental impacts due to institutional racism, economic disparity, classism, environmental and social injustice, citizenship status, and lack of respect for the language and cultural diversity within the communities.

Guiding Principles
- Put the community first
- Listen to local voices before reaching out to other partners and project planning
- Respond in a timely and appropriate manner community needs
- Prioritize equal access to information in multiple languages
- Embrace inclusivity

Figure 9: Ignored communities have long been denied a voice regarding environmental impacts and yet they have lots to contribute to the conversation.

Figure 10: Water is a great unifier. (Photo: Flickr, Cowcowder, NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0))

Figure 11: Healing the South Platte will require a unified effort to understand its tremendous resources. (Photo: Marisol Lopez)
3. **Prototype Solutions**

Following our values and guiding principles, we developed preliminary solutions to address key issues affecting the South Platte River and its users.

1. **Develop a South Platte River Campaign with Denver Parks and Recreation to reduce carbon emissions, increase restoration and the sense of community, and reduce dog waste into the South Platte River.**
   - **Target Audience:** Homeless People, Bikers.

2. **Partner with programs for youth on probation to be able to complete their community service hours by contributing solutions and participating in service projects that help restore and maintain the South Platte River.**
   - **Target Audience:** Homeless People, Bikers.

3. **Partner with science teachers from Denver Public Schools District to develop a South Platte River Service program where students can do service projects to protect and restore the South Platte and earn and apply a maximum of twenty semester hours (2 units) of community-based experience toward their high school graduation requirements.**

4. **Propose Amendment/s to improve the current no dumping laws that apply to the South Platte River.**

5. **Host an Annual River Festival, sponsored by the City and County of Denver, to publicize the health of the South Platte River.**

6. **Advance access to healthy fresh food, economic development, and water education through a Healthy Rivers Healthy Food Trucks program for the South Platte River corridor.**

7. **Develop partnership-building and partnership-enrichment programs through service projects that restore the South Platte River and bring communities to the River.**

8. **Develop a South Platte River program for homeless people that provides a greenhouse, jobs, and healthy food for the homeless population.**

9. **Develop a South Platte River bike program that increases the connectivity between all Denver city parks.**

10. **Increase trash cans and recycling in urban parks to reduce waste into the South Platte River.**

11. **Develop a Dog Waste Reduction Program for the South Platte River.**
Colorado Youth Advisory Council

Mission Statement:
The mission of the council has been to examine, evaluate and discuss the issues, interests and needs affecting Colorado youth now and in the future. They also try to formally advise and make recommendations to elected officials regarding those issues to find logistical solutions.

Governance Structure:
COYAC is intended to be a youth-led Council. The Council elects a Youth Co-Chair, Youth Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer who serve with a Legislative Co-Chair and Legislative Vice-Chair to lead the Council. Engaged Public (EP) supports the youth within the framework outlined by the enabling legislation, which provides guidance for leadership and structure. EP also develops a work plan, and provides the content for annual reports and the COYAC website.

The Council is made up of 40 young people, representing Colorado’s 35 state senate districts, and five at-large seats. These students have an interest in learning more about public policy, state government and are passionate about making a difference in their community and their state.

Denver District Attorney’s Youth Advisory Council

Mission Statement: To discuss issues regarding juvenile justice, youth-centered public safety and ways to improve the system.

Values:
- Integrity
- Respect
- Quality
- Community Safety
- Support Victims of Crime
- Transparency and Accountability
- Innovation

Governance Structure: Program Administrator will pick 14-20 diverse applicants who represent the community to serve on the council. The council will provide input needed to assist the District Attorney in prioritizing resources, targeting areas, and implementing strategies to achieve the council's goal of smarter juvenile justice and enhanced public safety. The council will meet monthly.

Funding: The City and County of Denver, Denver City Court and The U.S. Treasury

< Figure 20: Partnering with dog owners could help reduce the impact of dog waste on the river.>
Appendix: UB17 Letter of Support

July 4, 2019

As above it may concern,

We strongly believe that it would be valuable to have a Youth Advisory Council for the South Platte River. We, as representatives of Colorado’s youth, believe that such a Youth Advisory Council can provide the community to look after generations, provide a platform for the young, and ensure the health of the South Platte River.

At South Platte School District, we would like people to come about the South Platte River and be interested in the work that we are doing. The South Platte River is our home, and we believe in it. We believe that it is our responsibility to protect and conserve this precious resource. We are committed to making sure that the South Platte River is clean and healthy for future generations.

We value:

- The natural beauty of the South Platte River
- The ecological health of the South Platte River
- The wildlife that resides along the river
- The importance of clean water and healthy ecosystems
- The importance of public education and awareness
- Local partnerships, education, and serving our communities

We encourage you to write to your local representatives to support the establishment of the South Platte River Youth Advisory Council.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

[Names and Positions]
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The TRIO Upward Bound Program at Colorado State University

The TRIO Upward Bound program at CSU is a federally-funded grant sponsored by the Department of Education. UB Participants receive one-on-one mentoring from professional staff advisors to guide them through post-secondary admission and financial aid processes.

Upward Bound focuses on identifying qualified youth who are low-income and potential first-generation college students in order to support and encourage them in pursuit of post-secondary enrollment. Staff assist high school students in developing academic, social, and leadership skills in order to prepare them for post-secondary rigors, success, and graduation.