Lower Ark reviews Fountain Creek progress

The Fountain Creek Corridor Master Plan has generated millions, cooperation.

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ROCKY FORD — A partnership of agencies working on Fountain Creek could bring in as much as $6 million for projects in Pueblo and El Paso counties over the next two years.

“All this is stuff that is actually happening, not just a dream about what could happen,” said Jay Winner, general manager of the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District.

There are eight active projects along Fountain Creek, partly as a result of a partnership started three years ago between the Lower Ark district and Colorado Springs Utilities, said consultant Kevin Shanks.

A Fountain Creek Corridor Master Plan is being developed as a result of an agreement that is funded by $150,000 annually from both the Lower Ark and Colorado Springs. The groups agreed to fund the Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control and Greenway director’s salary, $100,000 per year this year and next as well.

The Fountain Creek district, formed last year, signed on as a partner in the projects this year.

All told, the partners will spend $1.2 million by the end of next year on the Fountain Creek project.

That money has leveraged between $3 million and $6 million in other funds, depending on whether some pending applications are approved.

“When we started, one of the biggest priorities was to establish demonstration projects that would get other people involved,” Shanks said. “Our partnerships have been extremely successful in the last couple of years.”

The most dramatic community effort has been the Fountain Creek Greenway project at the confluence with the Arkansas River. Under a Great Outdoors Colorado planning grant, the city of Pueblo is working to increase recreation and access to Fountain Creek.

“It’s become the No. 1 project in Pueblo, and is inspired by the efforts to improve the South Platte in Denver,” Shanks said.

As improvements have been made at Denver’s confluence park, real estate values have skyrocketed, he noted.

“Part of my madness is to take a hard left and take this thing all the way to Kansas,” Winner added, meaning that future improvements along the Arkansas River east of Pueblo could follow the model being developed in Pueblo.

Extension of the trail system along Fountain Creek, eventually to the Pinon Bridge is being planned.

There also is nearly $1 million available for a side detention and sediment removal project in Fountain Creek through Pueblo. The side detention pond will be at the North Side Walmart to decrease the intensity of small floods. When it is not flooded, it will create a wetlands area that will help wildlife and improve water quality, Shanks said.

The other large piece moving ahead are improvements at Clear Springs Ranch, south of Fountain.

The property is owned by Colorado Springs, and will include a fish passage, wetlands, bank improvements and improved sinuosity. The project, which is required for the Southern Delivery System under Pueblo County’s 1041 permit, will help reduce flood damage downstream, erosion and sedimentation.

“Without the agreement, Colorado Springs could have done Clear Springs Ranch and checked off the box,” Shanks said. “It would not have been done up to the standards of the master plan, however.”

There are other benefits from the partnership as well, Shanks said.

A stormwater criteria manual is being developed that could have regionwide application.

Another $10 million in federal and state grants or appropriations already are lined up in the wings.

The Fountain Creek Foundation, which has helped coordinate the Pueblo Greenway Project planning meetings and which is developing a documentary about the history of Fountain Creek, sprang up through the joint planning effort.

“As we’re thinking about what’s happening along Fountain Creek, it’s important to reach out to the community,” Shanks said.

FOUNTAIN CREEK PROJECTS

Here are active or planned projects along Fountain Creek that have been developed through the Fountain Creek Corridor Master Plan:

Eco-Fit Park: A park on the southern edge of Colorado Springs would stress youth fitness and environmental values. No cost has been specified, and the project has stalled in a slow economy.

City of Fountain Trailhead: The 8.5-acre site on the Toby Wells property has historic interest because of a Sears mail-order house in good condition. It would provide a trailhead, creek crossing for a trail along the creek and a community center.

Clear Spring Ranch: Part of the old Hanna Ranch, the property is owned by Colorado Springs. It would provide some flood control, wetlands restoration, creek improvements and a fish ladder. Pueblo County is requiring the improvements at the site south of Fountain under its 1041 permit for Southern Delivery System. An estimated $3.7 million is planned from various agencies.

Environmental Stewardship Center: An educational park and wildlife viewing area would be built on land being donated by a developer of a large subdivision near Pinon in Pueblo County.

Front Range Trail: A trail project would extend the existing trail system in Pueblo to the Pinon Bridge.

Side Detention and Sediment Removal: A $1 million project in Pueblo will begin this year to create a side detention pond behind the North Side Walmart, and to demonstrate how the Streamside Systems sediment collector will remove particles from water as it flows, improving water quality.

The Fountain Creek Greenway: Planning efforts for the Pueblo greenway project are being coordinated with improvements on the Historic East Side. In addition to improving access and recreation opportunities, it will improve wildlife habitat and increase the effectiveness of the levee system.

Midland Greenway Trail: A project just getting started on Colorado Springs' West Side would connect Fountain Creek to existing trails on Upper Fountain Creek along U.S. 24, near Gold Hill Mesa.

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Corridor Master Plan:www.fountain-crk