

Nature in the City

A Riparian and Community Restoration Master Plan for the Jordan River in Salt Lake City

~Coalition for Nature in the City~

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The Urban Riparian Restoration Concept and Vision

A rapidly growing coalition of environmental, recreational, faith and other organizations is pleased to announce a "Nature in the City" park system running continuously all the way across Salt Lake City along the Jordan River corridor. The plan outlined below would make the city an international showcase for transformative, state of the art urban riparian restoration while hugely benefiting both wildlife, communities, and the region's economy.

The proposed park system would consist of 17 linked "nature parks" encompassing about 775 acres of existing open lands wherein non-native plants would be largely removed and replaced with communities of native plants characteristic of the region and ecosystem, in the combinations normally found in wild nature, to the degree practical within an urban area. Wherever possible at reasonable cost and without flood risk within this 11-mile stretch of the Jordan River, the river banks would be re-contoured and the river flood plain would be widened to create river-adjacent wetland or swale areas where marsh plants and wildlife that relies upon wetlands--particularly amphibians, shorebirds, mammals, neotropical and other migratory bird populations--can find the food and shelter they need.

Of the total land area, about half is currently owned by the Salt Lake City Golf Enterprise Fund, about one third by Salt Lake City and already mostly within the city park system, and about one quarter by The State of Utah. In this proposal Salt Lake City would buy land it does not currently own and rezone it to the "natural open space" category.

Geopolitical context: potential golf course closures

This proposal leverages both the potential availability of land (due to proposed closure of several municipal golf courses due to declining utilization

and revenue) and of funding (from a general obligation bond necessary to provide funding for conversion of existing golf courses to other use.

Benefits of the plan

In large concept, a comprehensive, holistic approach to restoring wildlife habitat along the river corridor will benefit both wildlife populations--especially the hundreds of thousands of migratory birds traveling across our metropolitan area along two overlapping arms of the Central and Pacific flyways--and the neighborhoods and communities along the river. While helping to ensure the size and viability of migratory bird populations (and many other forms of wildlife) it will beautify the river corridor, and enrich it with healthy ecosystems of native plants and wildlife. Other benefits include:

- Enhancement of the quality of the outdoor recreation experience for users of the Jordan River Parkway and Jordan River Water Trail
- Creation of a powerful new "outdoor classroom" teaching environment where students at all levels from elementary school to graduate school can learn techniques of natural area, riparian and native plant restoration
- Direct exposure of lower income families on the city's culturally diverse West Side to native plants and wildlife along a beautified, enriched river corridor
- Water quality enhancement that will help the city and state meet its legal obligations under the Clean Water Act, resulting from improved erosion control and filtration of "dissolved solids" (sediment) due to stream bank re-grading, sediment trap installations, and biofiltration swales.
- Flood damage prevention resulting from reservation of Jordan River and Great Salt Lake flood plains from further commercial build out, preservation of existing flood water banking areas, and the removal of City Creek from an underground pipe highly vulnerable to clogging with mud and debris

- Immediate and long-term financial payback and economic benefit to Salt Lake City and Salt Lake County from increasing property values (and property tax revenues) along the margins of the proposed Nature in the City greenway , especially in areas of existing urban/industrial blight
- Huge advance in competitive edge for the Salt Lake City/Wasatch Front Metropolitan Area economy in competing with other cities world-wide to attract highly mobile, market-leading, breakthrough-technology companies whose leadership and work force prefer to live in cities that not only respect the natural world
- Stabilize and reinvigorate the financial status of the municipal golf system by eliminating the Golf Fund deficit and addressing the deferred maintenance problem as well, transferring resources from the financially failing west side golf courses to the better-used east side courses.
- Restore and beautify the worst industrial wastelands eyesore on the entire length of the Jordan River, between Fisher Mansion (200 S.) and the N. Temple bridge

Potential funding sources

The Salt Lake City council has identified the need for a general obligation bond to be placed on the fall 2015 ballot, to provide funding for any and all municipal golf course system transition costs, including conversion of golf courses that have already been or may soon be closed, for alternate use. The Coalition will propose that this bond be the primary immediate funding vehicle for the proposed nature park system. There are many additional potential sources of funding available through federal, state, and local agencies, foundations, and partnerships with private corporations, especially those who are landowners along the river.

Incremental, opportunistic approach

The size and composition of the proposed G.O. bond available for nature park conversion cannot be known until a good deal of public process has taken place to design and review the bond offering. Whatever amount such a bond might provide in the way of funding, Coalition leaders believe that the proposal outlined above will offer so many benefits to Salt Lake City residents and visitors, and to the region's economy, in comparison to its relatively modest cost, that such a plan will ultimately succeed over time. With its vision in place to guide future actions, additional nature parks can be created incrementally, as funding allows.

Furthermore, we believe that the vision outlined in the 2008 [Blueprint Jordan River Report](#) (which was endorsed by the Salt Lake City Council) and no less than [32 other reports, studies and programs across the past 50 years](#)), for a protected and restored natural Jordan River corridor, will ultimately expand beyond Salt Lake City to encompass the entire 55 mile "Lake to Lake" course of the Jordan River.

Project components, in priority order

- 1.) Three large "biodiversity anchor" nature parks** ranging from 82 up to 180 acres in size.
- 2.) River corridor restoration and connectivity for wildlife across the city**
- 3.) Jordan Parkway trail gap closure from 200 South to North Temple**
- 4.) Renovation of the historic Fisher Mansion to serve as a gateway from the community to the river, with programmatic funding to create a repository of local culture and history.**
- 5.) Jordan River Interpretive Center Building** (on former Par 3, Glendale or Rose Park Golf Course) to provide education about ecology, wildlife and native plants and ecological restoration techniques for 18 proximate elementary, middle and high schools serving a total of over 10,000 students.
- 6.) Utah Wildlife, Hunting and Fishing Information Center building**, possibly in the Glendale golf course club house.
- 7.) East-west bike commuter bike trail** from the Jordan River to downtown at South Temple Street.
- 8.) Restoration of the most blighted "brownfields" industrial wasteland on the river between 200 S. and N. Temple**
- 9.) Community Agriculture Portal/Buffer System (urban farms, community gardens, permaculture gardens and/or food forests**, to provide a fenced buffer between busy streets and nature parks and between wildlife and residential back yards, and also a pleasing transitional gateway from the city to the river
- 10.) "Daylighting" (bringing above ground) of City and Red Butte Creeks**