

## Grand Valley River Corridor Initiative (RCI)

### **Executive Summary**

#### PLANNING FRAMEWORK

##### Purpose:

The Planning Framework was conducted over the last eight months by OV Consulting in coordination with the Core Team members Joel Sholtes, Shannon Wadas, and Rusty Lloyd representing RCI, and the Jurisdictions of Mesa County, Fruita, Grand Junction and Palisade. The purpose of the Framework effort was to address the following:

- Develop a coordinated approach to creating a shared Vision for the River Corridor
- Explore planning and management strategies for the corridor that align with the vision
- Inform the engagement process with the community and
- Develop an agreed-upon planning framework and next steps

Representatives from each jurisdiction have contributed significant time and associated in-kind match. Since 2023, over \$6,000 of in-kind support has been contributed through the various workshops and RCI Advisory Council meetings, demonstrating a concerted commitment to the process outcome. Jurisdictional participants included:

Carrie Gudorf, Mesa County

Faye Hall, Mesa County

Erik Borschel, Mesa County

Laura Page, Mesa County

Sean Norris, Mesa County

Dan Caris, Fruita

Kimberly Bullen, Fruita

Mark Mancuso, Fruita

Sam Atkins, Fruita

David Thornton, Grand Junction

Jennifer Nitzky, Grand Junction

Ken Sherbenou, Grand Junction

Tamra Allen, Grand Junction

Tim Lehrbach, Grand Junction

Trenton Prall, Grand Junction

David Gray, Town of Palisade

Troy Ward, Town of Palisade

##### Workshop Process:

OV Consulting established a coordinated and cohesive jurisdictional Workshop Series for Mesa County, Fruita, Grand Junction, and Palisade focused on river corridor conditions,

jurisdictional needs and values associated with the river, a Vision for the Grand Valley River corridor, and identifying the right next steps in securing that Vision. Workshop discussions were supported by local area research, mapping, and river planning best practices that informed the groups' progress and decision-making around the next steps.

#### WORKSHOP #1 – REVIEW, REFINE AND SET DIRECTION | NOVEMBER 7, 2023

At this first workshop, jurisdictions identified the challenges that they face along the river, studied the value of recently completed Fluvial Hazard Buffer (FHB) mapping, and uncovered the values and assets of the corridor today. They asked themselves, "Where do we want to be in 20-30 years?" The group discussed the nexus of land use policy, population growth, and river systems and the balance needed to ensure smart growth and a future healthy river in the Grand Valley.

#### WORKSHOP #2 – SET THE VISION, EXPLORE PEER CITIES & DETERMINE THE TOOLS FOR SUCCESS | FEBRUARY 6, 2024

In the second workshop jurisdictions built upon the values identified in Workshop 1 and drafted a River Corridor Vision to be shared with the RCI Advisory Council. They explored river planning strategies in Peer Cities and built consensus around the right next steps for the Grand Valley River Corridor.

The three main components of Workshop #2 included:

- Draft Grand Valley River Corridor Vision
- Peer City River Corridor Planning and Management Strategies
- Agreement on appropriate planning approach for Grand Valley jurisdictions

It was decided that a letter of support would provide the agreement needed among the jurisdictions to move forward with a Grand Valley River Corridor Master Plan that would address the newly developed Vision and provide consistent direction to river recreation, river health, mobility, and edge development at a policy level.

#### WORKSHOP #3 – CONFIRM DIRECTION AND NEXT STEPS | MAY 8, 2024

At the third and final workshop, jurisdictions confirmed the Final Grand Valley River corridor Vision, reviewed supporting documentation, and confirmed the strategy for executing letter of support. Jurisdictions also discussed funding opportunities and the timing and estimated cost of advancing the Master Planning process.

The following pages describe the work that supported the workshop discussions and informed the decision process.

#### CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

Key challenges identified during the jurisdictional process along the river corridor today include coordination among the three municipalities and one county, siloed decision-making, the number of groups, organizations, and agencies participating in the existing and future use of the river, shrinking summer and fall flows, environmentally threatened species, and growing riverfront development pressure. Jurisdictions shared current development locations and

challenges along the river and expressed interest in the balance between growth and preservation of the natural environment along the river corridor.

The recently completed Fluvial Hazard Zone delineation of the Grand Valley identifies, among other things, the Active Stream Corridor (ASC) and the Fluvial Hazard Buffer (FHB), also referred to as the Fluvial Hazard Zone (FHZ). Although many rivers in our cities are channelized today, a healthy river corridor typically migrates and retains the room in which to migrate through the urbanized area (or within segments therein).

The ASC is the corridor within which the river channel would migrate if left alone and is typically much wider than the visible river footprint. Beyond the ASC lies the margins, often valley slopes, that may not flood but could be influenced by the river channel known as the FHZ.

Since 1937 the river through Grand Valley has migrated significantly and minimizing impact to development while allowing that migration is critical. The mapping of both the ASC and FHZ is an important step in understanding potential risks for existing and future land use and in defining a future pathway for the river. Future channel migration potential and the FHZ should influence infrastructure investment locations, land use patterns, and future development in proximity to the river. Additionally, this information can reveal opportunities for increased parks or open spaces that support the health of the river, giving it space to migrate.

To visualize this, OV Consulting overlaid the FHZ with planned jurisdictional land use along the river corridor for consideration in evaluating the future of the river corridor. The figure illustrates locations where the FHZ impacts land use development or aligns with open spaces today and reveals the locations where smart, safe and compatible development patterns make sense. This overlay can enable jurisdictions to stay in front of potential river migration, reconnect to the floodplain and restore river health. FHZ mapping should guide jurisdictional decision-making around land use and infrastructure decisions, inform parks and recreational opportunities, and be central to a public education and communication program.

## CHALLENGES AND VALUES

During the workshop series, representatives from each jurisdiction collectively discussed their core values around land use and the river corridor and identified top priorities or considerations for the future health of the river:

- Ecological health, riparian habitat, and aquatic species are the top priority.
- The river is a recreational asset and public amenity and recreational use in and along the river corridor is important. Recreational use in Grand Valley is largely “because” of the river.
- The river is a spine; trail connectivity along the river and increased access to the river is critical.
- Activation, economic development, and housing supply along the river are important aspects of the river’s edge.
- Open space, viewsheds, and natural environment along the river should be integrated with river’s edge and influence development decisions (not a commercialized strip)
- Increased education, engagement, and awareness of all aspects of river health and use is important.

Input from previous river corridor stakeholder workshops from 2020-2022 was also referenced to confirm the jurisdictional values. Important features of the River Corridor and critical threats and challenges were identified:

*Note: Values represent the percentage of surveyed stakeholders who identified these items.*

Important features of the river corridor:

- Wildlife Habitat / Ecology: **100%**
- Aesthetic Beauty / Community Identity: **60%**
- Recreation / Open / Green Space: **60%**
- Agricultural: **35%**

River corridor threats and challenges:

- Water Use (Irrigation / Muni / Agriculture): **31%**
- Recreation/Tourism/Health: **23%**
- Wildlife Habitat (Fish/Riparian): **18%**
- Economy / Development: **8%**
- Education / Awareness: **5%**

## VISIONING

The key challenges and jurisdictional values identified in Workshop #1 served as the foundation for the Visioning exercise held in Workshop #2. Workshop attendees formed three groups to confirm shared values and craft language in support of a river corridor vision. Input ranged from full vision statements to the identification of supporting vision elements. Draft language and key input on the Vision included the following:

- Commit to supporting a vibrant and healthy river corridor that benefits a diverse community of stakeholders for future generations.
- Activate areas with parks, open spaces, and trails.
- Keep commercial uses out of the flood zone.
- Cluster land uses and create sub-areas for diverse uses, from urbanized to passive natural areas.
- Consider buffer zones within the sub-areas and avoid development with the Fluvial Hazard Zone.
- Plan for “100 Years” or “The Next Century” or “Forever” along our river.

## THE GRAND VALLEY RIVER CORRIDOR VISION

*“The communities of the Grand Valley are committed to a science-driven approach to steward a resilient, vibrant, and healthy river corridor that supports the values of agriculture, habitat and wildlife, recreation, economic growth, and sustainable development benefiting today's and future generations.”*

## SUPPORTING VISION ELEMENTS TO GUIDE FUTURE PLANNING: (DRAFT)

### 1. “Ecology & Wildlife Resilience” / “A Dynamic River”

- Prioritize the restoration and preservation of riparian habitats, aquatic ecosystems, and wildlife corridors.
- Give the river room to move.
- Implement proactive measures to mitigate invasive species, re-mediate landslides, and enhance water quality.
- Build resilience to natural hazards, climate change impacts, and socio-economic challenges through adaptive planning and management strategies.
- Prioritize measures to enhance floodplain management, wildfire resilience, and public safety within the river corridor.

## **2. “A Recreational Asset” / “A Recreational River”**

- Celebrate recreational opportunities along the river corridor while safeguarding its natural beauty and ecological integrity.
- Provide inclusive and equitable public access to activities, such as hiking, biking, paddling, and wildlife observation.
- Promotes the corridor as both a community and tourist destination

## **3. “A Connected Corridor”**

- Promote seamless connectivity with an extensive network of trails, parks, and green spaces along the river corridor.
- Ensure equitable access to the riverfront for all community members, including measures to address barriers and enhance safety.

## **4. “Grand Valley Vitality”**

- Encourage responsible economic development that harmonizes with agricultural needs and environmental systems.
- Support innovative projects that enhance the riverfront's economic vitality, create job opportunities, and attract visitors.

## **5. “Balanced Land Use”**

- Integrate land use planning efforts to balance development interests with ecological preservation goals.
- Consider regulations and policies that promote resilient and adaptive development patterns.

## **6. “Corridor Communities” / “Community First”**

- Cultivate a sense of stewardship, community ownership, and acknowledgment of the river through robust public engagement and educational outreach programs.
- Empower residents, stakeholders, and future generations to participate in decision-making processes and advocate for the river's well-being.

## **7. “Collaborative Governance” / “A United River Corridor”**

- Foster collaborative partnerships among government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private stakeholders to manage the river corridor.
- Establish a coordinated governance framework to facilitate joint planning, resource-sharing, and collective action.

## **PLANNING TOOLS AND STRATEGIES**

Cities and Counties across the United States are working to reclaim their rivers and improve the health of often industrialized river corridors. Numerous tools are available, and it is the

job of each jurisdiction to determine the right path forward for their river corridor. Following the development of the Grand Valley River Vision, jurisdictions explored a range of planning tools and strategies that could be used to achieve the Vision.

The diagram shown below organizes a range of tools into three tiers, ranging in scale and regulatory strength. Tools can be adopted by jurisdictions individually, or tools could be adopted on a multi-jurisdictional level and applied along the entirety of the Grand Valley River Corridor. Often this sort of broader application occurs through the delineation of space along the river referred to as an “influence zone” or “special planning area”, or “river district”.

Tier 1: Broad Tools

- Multi-jurisdictional Plans
- Mapping / Inventory
- Planning Guidance
- Resolutions
- IGAs

Tier 2: Intermediate Tools

- Regulations / Ordinances
- Conservancy / Management Districts
- Design Guidelines
- Special Purpose Plans

Tier 3: Site-Specific Tools

- Sub-Area Plans
- Zoning Amendments
- Site-Specific Improvements
- Agreement for Future Planning

Following discussion of the range of planning tools and strategies in place in other cities, the jurisdictions debated the appropriate next steps for the Grand Valley. While land use decisions are unique to each jurisdiction, the importance of a consistent approach and overarching guidance to recreation, mobility, land use development and preservation of the river corridor is vital to its future. It was decided that a multi-jurisdictional River Corridor Master Plan would provide the guidance desired and still allow zoning and development decisions at the local level.

A letter of support from Palisade, Grand Junction, Fruita, and Mesa County will pledge continued support to plan collaboratively along the River Corridor, enter into a Master Planning process, and follow the policy direction provided through that document in the future. Decisions around the delineation of space along the river, and the formation of future river districts, special zones, or governance strategies would be discussed in coordination with the Master Planning process.

This Planning Framework documents the identification of core values, visioning process, and agreement by Grand Valley jurisdictions to consider the future of their river corridor and take the agreed upon planning steps to enhance and preserve that future.

## **CITY SPOTLIGHTS**

Boise, Idaho:

Boise, ID built upon a series of planning efforts to address 10 miles of the Boise River.

1. Original Boise River Plan (1985)
2. Boise River System Ordinance (1997)
3. Boise River Resource Management and Master Plan (1999)
4. Master Plan Update (2014)

Key Outcomes: The Greenbelt Setback – All activities & development within the setback require River System application. River recommendations address safety, lighting, security, recreation, signage and wayfinding, ecology, and riparian habitat.

Los Angeles River, California:

LA River Master Plan is a multi-jurisdictional river corridor plan covering 51 miles of river through multiple jurisdictions. Goals associated with the Master Plan include:

1. Reduce flood risk and improve resiliency.
2. Provide equitable, inclusive, and safe parks, open space, and trails.
3. Support healthy connected ecosystems.
4. Enhance opportunities for equitable access to the river corridor.
5. Embrace and enhance opportunities for arts and culture.
6. Address potential adverse impacts to housing affordability and people experiencing homelessness.
7. Foster opportunities for continued community engagement, development, and education.
8. Improve local water supply reliability.
9. Promote healthy, safe, and clean water.

Key Outcomes: River Improvement Overlay District (RIO). A Special Use district and implemented ordinance that requires projects within the district to address watershed, urban design and mobility guidelines. Extends ½ mile to either side of the river for 32 miles in length.

City of Colorado Springs, Colorado:

Through a series of regulatory tools and design guidelines, the City of Colorado Springs has planned for the future of their river. Beginning in 2002, the City adopted the Streamside Ordinance establishing oversight of the area along the river. Subsequently, the Streamside Overlay Zone identified 3 stream types and varying buffer widths for protection of each type. The Streamside Design Guidelines evaluate development within the Streamside Overlay Zone against 11 review criteria including site design, trails and recreation, floodplain, natural features, stream bank stabilization and riparian buffers, among others. The Ordinance and Overlay Zone were updated in 2007.

Acknowledgment:

The efforts of the jurisdiction to work through the Visioning process and to identify the future steps to preserve the Grand Valley River Corridor is a critical step. Acknowledgment is credited to the jurisdictions, River's Edge West, and the supporting consultants for a successful process and agreed upon Master Planning outcome.

Thank You:

Carrie Gudorf, Mesa County

Faye Hall, Mesa County

Erik Borschel, Mesa County

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Sean Norris, Mesa County

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Tim Lehrbach, Grand Junction

Trenton Prall, Grand Junction

David Gray, Town of Palisade

Troy Ward, Town of Palisade

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Mary Cornforth, Strategic by Nature

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Mark Johnson, Civitas

Troy Thompson, ERC