

Flood project transforms South Platte into city gem

Mayor terms venture 'marvel' of engineering

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It took 13 years, \$25 million and untold hours of negotiations and engineering work.

But a 2.5-mile stretch of the South Platte River in north Denver has been transformed from a garbage-strewn haven for drug dealers and taggers to a "crown jewel" for the city.

City leaders and others Monday marked the completion of Denver's largest flood-control project at a dedication along the river near Franklin Street.

The South Platte River project in the Globeville area removed 300 acres of mostly industrial land in Denver and south Adams County from the 100-year floodplain by retooling the riverbed and making it 6 to 8 feet deeper in spots.

That means business owners and residents - some of whom recall the devastating flooding of the South Platte in 1965 - will no longer be required to buy flood insurance.

"North Denver residents and businesses are now

safer than ever before," said Nancy McNally, Westminster mayor and chairwoman of the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District.

The banks have been cleaned up and made more attractive to wildlife.

The river bottom has been reshaped in spots to create pockets for fish.

A pedestrian underpass and bridge have been constructed. Greenway trails now connect to those in Adams County.

The first phase of the project was completed 11 years ago. The biggest challenge was removing the Burlington Ditch/O'Brien diversion, which created a steep waterfall, and building a weir with boulders to more naturally regulate flow.

The work began in fall 2005 and was completed May 1.

City officials hope development will follow. A separate park project, for instance, turned a vacant sewer plant into the Northside Park.

The "water engineering marvel," as Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper put it, was paid for by the city's Wastewater Management Division and the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District.

Lifelong north Denver resident, Dennis Lobato, 62, recalled the days when the South Platte frothed with pollutants and foul odors emanated from a nearby sewer plant and meatpacking houses.

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"It's beautiful compared to what it used to be," said Lobato, who attended the ceremony with his 7-year-old granddaughter.

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Project highlights

- * **Creation of** 12-foot-wide colored concrete path for bicyclists and pedestrians, including 9,600 feet of pathway. Path now connects to trails in Adams County.
- * **Pedestrian bridge** over the river near Franklin Street as well as an underpass.
- * **Deepening** of the South Platte River by 6 to 8 feet in spots to create more room for floodwaters and removal of 300 acres from the 100-year floodplain.
- * **Removal** and reconstruction of a 36-inch Denver Water suspended water line.
- * **Removal** of the Burlington Dam and creation of a weir upstream of Franklin Street.

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