



Longtime residents of Fort Collins and northern Colorado have fond memories of summer days and evenings spent swimming, fishing, and picnicking at Gateway. These activities continue today. Through Gateway Natural Area visitors have access to thousands of acres of land including Seaman Reservoir (City of Greeley), Roosevelt National Forest, and State Land Board lands which are leased by the Colorado Division of Wildlife for hunting and by individuals for grazing.

Thank you!

Citizens of Fort Collins and Larimer County worked hard to ensure that Gateway Natural Area remains open for all to enjoy. Your citizen-initiated sales tax dollars provide visitor services at Gateway and other natural areas.

[fcgov.com/naturalareas](http://fcgov.com/naturalareas)  
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Natural Areas Department **970-416-2815**

Rangers **970-416-2147**

Gateway Natural Area **970-407-1106**

For a guided walk **970-416-2815**



*naturally yours*

CITY OF FORT COLLINS

## HISTORY OF GATEWAY NATURAL AREA

### *TWO RIVERS BECOME ONE AT GATEWAY*

From ancient to modern times, people have lived, played, hunted, and fished along the waters of the Cache la Poudre River.

Starting high in northern Rocky Mountain National Park, the main stem of the Cache la Poudre River flows north then east through the Poudre Canyon. The North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River begins in remote

northwestern Larimer County in the Roosevelt National Forest east of the Medicine Bow Range. It flows east, passing south of Virginia Dale, where it is impounded by Halignan Reservoir. It then turns south, flowing past Livermore, going through Seaman Reservoir and joining the main stem of the Poudre River at Gateway Natural Area.



The confluence of rivers are special places. At Gateway Natural Area these two rivers join and flow through the Town of Laporte and the City of Fort Collins. The river then joins the South Platte River east of Greeley and eventually makes its way to the Mississippi River.

The ancient valley carved by the North Fork over millennia was used for several travel routes: the Cherokee and Overland trails, the Union Pacific Railroad, and U.S. Highway 287 between Fort Collins and Laramie, Wyoming.

## THE FIRST PEOPLE

Folsom projectile points found in the region indicate that people have been living along the Poudre River for at least 12,000 years. Native American tribes such as the Ute, Arapaho, and Cheyenne lived in the region as early as 100 A.D. and still reside here today.

## NAMING THE RIVER

*Cache la poudre* is French meaning “hide the powder.” Local legend says that in the fall of 1836 a group of French-Canadian fur trappers and traders were stopped by a snowstorm south of the current town of Laporte (10 miles southeast of Gateway). They had to lighten the wagons before they could continue through deep snow. They stashed items, including several hundred pounds of gunpowder in a large hole dug into the south bank of the river. The supplies were later retrieved. From then on the river was known as “Cache La Poudre.”

Twenty-six years later the Ninth Kansas Cavalry at Fort Laramie, Wyoming, was sent to Laporte to protect travelers along the Cherokee Trail and Overland Stage Line. Their camp was named “Camp Collins” in honor of Lieutenant Colonel William Collins, a popular commander. Camp Collins was flooded by the river in 1864 and moved to present-day Fort Collins. With the security provided by the troops more settlers began arriving. Fort Collins remained a military post until 1866.

The city was incorporated in February 1873. The 1870 census showed the combined populations of Larimer and adjacent Jackson counties was 838 people.

## A THIRSTY CITY

Early Fort Collins residents had no source of treated drinking water. People got water from either an irrigation canal running through town or purchased it from a vendor. In 1883, concerns about fires and water-borne diseases resulted in the first water treatment facility located on Overland Trail, south of Laporte. The river water was transported via wrought-iron pipes into Fort Collins. Eventually this ditch grew to 40 miles of distribution lines. This facility operated until 1904.

In the early 1900s, Fort Collins obtained senior water rights to the Cache La Poudre River and built the Poudre Canyon Treatment Plant at the confluence of the Cache La Poudre and North Fork rivers at Gateway Natural Area.

The original water treatment plant at Gateway was a two-story brick building which was expanded in 1927 and 1955. This plant provided filtering which helped reduce the spread of diseases. The water was diverted from the river to a settling pond and tested for pH, turbidity, and conductivity. If necessary, chemicals were added to clarify the water. It was then pumped into the plant and treated in deep, rectangular pits lined with gravel, sand, and

charcoal. The water was fluoridated and chlorinated before final delivery to homes in Fort Collins. The land around the plant was maintained as a park and open to the public.



*Original treatment plant.*

City of Fort Collins Utility Services still moves water from the diversion dam at Gateway, removes the sediment, and then pipes the water to the new treatment facility on West Laporte Avenue.

## MORE RECENTLY

In the late 1970s, the Poudre Canyon Treatment Plant (known as the “Water Works Park”) was closed to the public because of security concerns. In the late 1980s, the plant was permanently closed as it could no longer meet the water demands of a quickly growing Fort Collins. After years of community effort and at a cost of \$1.3 million to improve access from Highway 14, the City of Fort Collins reopened the park in 2002.

It was managed by the Parks Department until 2006, when the City’s Natural Areas Department took over management and renamed it Gateway Natural Area.



*Treatment plant after the last expansion.*