



River Health Assessment Framework Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the purpose of this project?

The purpose is to develop an assessment framework that quantitatively describes the City's aspirations for a healthy and resilient Poudre River. This framework will help assess, guide, and inform the City's efforts to support and sustain the health of the river.

2. Who developed the River Health Assessment Framework? Does the Project Team reflect other City interests?

The River Health Framework considers a wide range of City interests and activities related to the Poudre River. A diverse project team collaborated to develop the Framework, including staff representing interests related to natural resources, recreation, stormwater management, water supply and treatment, and City regulatory functions.

3. Why is the City doing the project?

The River Health Assessment Framework is intended to better articulate what a 'healthy river' means, and to provide a common framework for all City departments against which river-related initiatives can be evaluated. It will be used as a tool to provide internal guidance on how the City supports and sustain the river.

4. How will the River Health Assessment affect City work?

The River Health Framework is a science-based tool that can be used to evaluate City projects for their potential impacts or benefits to the Poudre River. It focuses on potential impacts to key ecological indicators. City staff can also use the Framework to evaluate whether an external project is in support of or detriment to the City's stated River Health goals.

5. What projects/types of projects will this apply to?

The River Health Assessment Framework will apply to projects that directly or indirectly cause physical changes to the river channel, alter the amount or quality of the water in the river, or affect riparian and aquatic habitats.

6. Each component of the ecosystem is graded on an A-F scale. What is the reference condition?

The reference standard is designed to be both aspirational and theoretically achievable, while acknowledging real political, jurisdictional, economic and physical barriers. For a given indicator, an "A" grade represents a self-sustaining condition, meaning no management is needed and that the condition supports other characteristics of a functionally healthy river.

7. Is the "A" grade an outcome that will meet the interests of the community?

The City calls for a "healthy resilient river" in many plans, projects and documents. A healthy, self-sustaining Poudre River provides a myriad of social, economic and environmental benefits to our community. The River Health Assessment Framework does not dictate particular decisions or outcomes (such as an "A"). Rather, it puts the City in a position to clearly evaluate river health impacts in conjunction with other important social and economic considerations.

8. What outreach has been done?

City staff have reviewed this project with three Council advisory boards (Land Conservation and Stewardship Board, Natural Resources Advisory Board and Water Board), will meet with stakeholder groups and will hold an open house on May 21. City Council will review the project on May 12; if Council desires additional follow-up that will be provided.

9. Are your recommendations based on data?

The development of the River Health Assessment Framework was developed by an interdisciplinary technical team and grounded in science, local context, and existing data where available. On the Poudre River it is fortunate that some degree of data for more than half of the metrics is available.

10. Are your recommendations reasonably achievable and if not, why bother recommending them?

There have been significant changes to the river over time. Returning to a natural river is likely not achievable. This framework recommends ranges for each indicator that are aspirational but achievable in light of current conditions. If the recommended ranges were achieved, these indicators would point to a healthy, functioning, resilient river.

11. Does the framework incorporate federal or state legal standards? Why/why not?

Yes – state water quality standards were incorporated into the framework. These standards are used to evaluate the quality of Colorado waters and establish regulatory requirements for activities that may impact water quality.

12. Will the recommendation ranges direct other agencies what to do on the river?

No. The River Health Assessment Framework will not direct river-related activities or policies, either for the City of Fort Collins or outside agencies. However, the Framework will provide useful information, context, and metrics to evaluate the impact of such activities or policies on the City's goals for a healthy and resilient river.

