

# Fort Collins Idea Lab – Treetop Bridge

## *Over the River and Through the Woods*

Imagine exploring our local river ecosystem by walking along a treetop height bridge that spans the Poudre River. Locals and visitors alike could take part in the opportunity to see a vital Fort Collins landscape from a new and different perspective, and this type of draw in the city would enhance recreational value and pinpoint the river as a tourist destination.

At one time, the City of Fort Collins largely turned its back on the Poudre. Its banks were home to gravel pits, industrial equipment yards, landfills, power plants, and petroleum manufacturers. Recently, though, more and more people are drawn to the river for recreation, to enjoy nature, and to discover the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, all located near the river.

Flows in the Poudre have been declining through the years, and may continue to do so in the future. In spite of our recent 2013 flood and ongoing streamside restoration work, scientists tell us that cottonwood forests along much of the river are not getting the periodic high flows necessary to sustain the trees. As the older trees die, they will be replaced by more drought-tolerant species, many of which may be invasive (1).

This transformation, as well as the growing popularity of the river, presents the city with an opportunity. The Poudre River is an important ecosystem that houses diverse plant communities and an abundance of native wildlife; information about this river system and its potential changes and evolution can be displayed in an educational manner.

I propose that the City consider installing a “Treetop Bridge” at an appropriate location along the river that would encourage locals and visitors to learn about and explore the Poudre River. This bridge could be a teaching experience, and could easily complement the efforts being made to incorporate scientific discovery and natural area enjoyment near the river.



*A treetop walkway like this one in Australia could benefit the local Fort Collins community and educate the public about the natural environment.*

Signage would explain how the forest is changing; how to identify the tree species, birds, and other animals that live in each kind of tree; and could identify on a host of ecosystem interactions. This could be initiated through partnerships with CSU’s Environmental Learning Center or the Discovery Center.

This Treetop Bridge would quickly become a magnet for residents and tourists just as such bridges have elsewhere (2)(3), and be fun for people of all ages. It would provide a unique aerial perspective of a river and its associated streamside system that we so rarely get. Grants should be easy to obtain.

***This is a Big, Tall Idea. First imagine it, then do it!***

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More information:

1. <http://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/pdf/poudre-plan-part1.pdf>
2. In Walpole-Nornalup National Park, Australia: <http://www.crikey-adventure-tours.com/valley-of-the-giants.html>
3. In Perth, Australia: <http://blog.awaystay.com/category/nature/page/2/>