

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION: WATERSHED — STORMWATER HABITAT EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT CREATING AN ELEMENTARY WATERSHED EDUCATION PROGRAM

Conducted by: City of Fort Collins Stormwater Utility
 On the Web: fcgov.com/utilities/watershed.php
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 Project Partners: Poudre School District, City of Fort Collins Parks Department,
 City of Fort Collins Utilities Department
 Contract Period: 1996 to 1998
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 Matching Funds: \$17,000

Public education is an important part of integrated resources management. With the aid of a 1996 NPS grant, the City of Fort Collins created a multi-disciplinary, hands-on educational program to increase awareness of water quality issues and help reduce pollution.

In 1995, the City of Fort Collins was using a trade-show type booth to create awareness of water quality issues among teachers and students attending environmental fairs, and experiencing disappointing results.

The challenge was how to bring the material directly to the classroom. Existing coursework did not include water quality issues, nor were these issues part of the mandatory state

educational testing, the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP).

The schools were teaching discrete units on plants, animals, water, earth materials, landforms and ecology in grades 1-6. There also was significant interest in local bodies of water.

In general, teachers lacked the time, equipment and background necessary to provide the water resources education envisioned by the city, and with significant competition for

the limited discretionary classroom time, it was apparent that new resources were needed.

The City decided to craft activities that would meet Colorado Model Content

“The overall theme of the teachers’ and parents’ comments revolved around how engaged the children were! They were constantly doing something where they had to think. They were doing science! They loved it!”

– Andrew Kinard, 5th Grade Teacher



Standards. An education coordinator, Marcee Camenson, was hired to select appropriate activities, purchase the necessary equipment and contact interested teachers for field trips.

Concurrently, Fort Collins Department of Utilities crews set out to improve stormwater detention ponds for use as outdoor classrooms. Changes to mowing regimens and the creation of wetlands and small boardwalks created environments for study.

Since the start of the project, the stormwater utility department has worked with the City's Parks Department, environmental groups, community service organizations and the school district to create five outdoor classrooms in city-owned detention ponds. Seven additional sites along Spring Creek, Fossil Creek and the Poudre River also are commonly used. The stormwater utility recently has partnered with the City's "Art in Public Places" program to create an interpretive center complete with "environmental art" about watershed topics.

In 2001, the WaterSHED program achieved more than 6,500 contact hours with 4,245 students, teachers and volunteers — increasing appreciation of local water bodies and their inhabitants along with awareness of the sources of nonpoint source pollution.



"Teachers today are busy with many demands placed on them by the increased focus on standards and testing. Based upon the number of people experiencing our local waters, we're happy to report you can lead students to water and you can help them think."

— Kevin McBride, City of Fort Collins