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# FORT COLLINS COLORADOAN

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## Park designer restores the wild to the water

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO  
The Coloradoan

Gary Lacy is standing next to Boulder Creek watching kids play in the water of Eben G. Fine Park, one of several paddling parks the 44-year-old hydraulic engineer has designed in Colorado.

"I can tell you every rock that was put in there and where it came from," said Lacy, who spent the last 10 years designing parks across the state.



Sherri Barber/The Coloradoan

**WATER TOY:** Gary Lacy plays Thursday in one of the rapids he created in Boulder Creek.



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Lacy arrange piles of boulders in flowing water to create a limitless potential for kayakers who spend hours in a single hole, honing skills and mastering moves.

"The goal is to make it look natural and function naturally," Lacy said. "We cannot improve on nature. But most of the rivers in Colorado are not in their natural state. We now have the technology and equipment to restore these rivers."

His work includes the entire 5-mile Boulder Creek bike path and whitewater park in Boulder, which includes 37 drops and waves; the Yampa River park in Steamboat Springs; the Clear Creek park in Golden; part of the Confluence Park, where the South Platte River and Cherry Creek meet in Denver; and part of the Salida whitewater park

and slalom course on the Arkansas River. Lacy also designed or offered insight on proposed whitewater parks in Pueblo, Gunnison, Grand Junction, Palisade, Breckenridge, Silverthorne and Vail, where construction of a \$240,000 whitewater park at Gore Creek is scheduled to begin in October.

"I'm just about as surprised as anyone else at how popular and embraced (these parks) are by the community in general and the whitewater community," Lacy said. "A lot of us don't have three hours to drive somewhere to kayak. We have one hour after work and that is one reason why these park and play areas are so popular. People are seeing what other communities have done and are hoping to capitalize on that same success."

Matt Evans is counting on it. The 31-year-old Evans, who is

the co-owner of the Mountain Shop in Fort Collins, is spearheading the effort to get a similar river enhancement on a quarter-mile stretch of the Poudre River between Linden and Lincoln streets.

"Last year things really picked up," Evans said. "When you look at it as a river enhancement project, I think everybody wins. It's not just for the paddlers."

The original river enhancement proposal was submitted to city planners and the parks department in 1995 as a proposal for a paddling park. Since then, the proposal has slowly gained momentum, and city officials appear receptive to the plan.

The city council approved the Downtown River Corridor Implementation Program on Tuesday night. The program includes 19 projects, one of which is a feasibility study to look at recreation enhancements.

"We are still a ways off, but this is the first step at taking a look at (creating a paddling park)," said Timothy Wilder, city planner with the city advance planning department. "There is certainly a lot of interest right now."

"I'm hoping by the end of the year we can initiate this feasibility study. Next summer, depending upon the outcome, we could get into the next stage, which would be coming up with a design and then getting into the construction. A couple years will probably need to pass before (a paddling park) comes to fruition."

Added Evans: "It was a wonderfully excited outcome. This is the first step and we need to see a couple more take place. What I sense is that the county took in a lot of information over the past couple years and there is a demand for river

Whitewater River Park Articles

Recreation Engineering & Planning  
485 ARAPAHOE AVE., BOULDER, CO 80302  
PHONE / FAX (303) 545-5883