

IS 40 FEET ENOUGH?

By Marv Ballantyne and Wayne Quade, Montrose Uncompahgre Valley Association, January 2010

“The Uncompahgre River is one of Montrose’s great, but hidden assets. It flows through the City in a broad, meandering pattern, lined with tall cottonwood trees, and a variety of other riparian vegetation. Resident wildlife, including deer, smaller mammals, raptors and other birds, and aquatic species all use the river for habitat and a movement corridor...”

—2008 Comprehensive Plan



How will future generations in Montrose see its parks, trails, and riverway corridor? Will they find them useful, healthy, and well protected? Will they be indicators of a healthy community, contented residents, and a vibrant business environment? These things are all possible if we act now to protect them.

“a 100-foot buffer should be maintained between the river and any pavement or constructed structures;” (2008 Comprehensive Plan, p. 9-5) [A buffer is defined as open space from river’s edge to any pavement or structures.]

Good regulations resulting in a well protected riverway provide benefits to the public, and also to land owners and developers. River protection, in the form of a buffer that provides pleasant scenic vistas, space for wildlife and protection from runoff can enhance the value of all properties in the river corridor. Unfortunately, many properties currently fall far short of their potential.



The city council and administration are well aware of the opportunities to enhance this wonderful asset, and have worked to direct new development and redevelopment of private lands to achieve this goal. The value of the river is recognized in the Comprehensive Plan updated in March 2008. Numerous public meetings have been held since and citizens clearly support protecting and enhancing the river.

When proposed regulations became controversial, the city appointed several citizen volunteers to a Montrose River Corridor Work Group to come up with a plan to help implement the Comprehensive Plan as related to the river. The Comprehensive Plan recommends a 100 foot buffer until a river master plan can be developed. Council asked

the work group to recommend policies that would protect the 100 foot buffer as an interim measure.

The working group's recommendations provide a complicated system of determining the width of the buffer. **With a variety of credits and averaging, their plan would sometimes allow a buffer as small as 40 feet.** Many of us in UVA believe the 100 feet should be maintained except in extreme circumstances, at least until the river master plan is developed. Our reasons are:

1. This would be an interim regulation; the ordinance should be more rather than less stringent. A river master plan is now funded, but will probably take at least a year to complete.
2. The Comprehensive Plan requires a 100 foot buffer.
3. The EPA generally recommends 100 feet, sometimes more.
4. Anything less than 100 feet is not based on scientific analysis, nor is it adequate to provide meaningful river protection.
5. The proposal to allow a smaller buffer is calculated through a complicated process which is hard to comprehend and would be difficult to administer fairly.
6. If a 100 foot buffer makes it too difficult to develop certain properties, the city's existing variance procedure is available for remedy.

We believe the requirements of the Comprehensive Plan should be upheld, particularly for an interim position. If you agree that the river needs more than a 40 foot buffer, please make your views known to City Council. Future Montrose citizens will be glad you did.