

RIVER SISTERS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A Turquoise Necklace for Denver's South Platte River

Contributors: Alfredo Reyes, Nita Gonzales, Adrianna Abarca, Stella Madrid, Lisa Saenz, Soliday Lopez, Jenny Santos, Jorge Figueroa and Paul Hellmund.



PURPOSE: A LIVING POLICY STATEMENT

A living community statement that combines policy with storytelling to re-imagine a public riverwalk concept along the South Platte River, with cultural exchanges across Denver, Colorado and with San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora.

INTRODUCTION

The shape of a Circle has been foundational to societies across time, from geometry to astrology. It has taken sacred and spiritual significance, binding humanity to the largest celestial bodies, the smallest of atoms and the healing of the Medicine Wheel. The Circle brings the spirit of nature into intelligible space in ways that create awareness of the importance of preserving our natural environment and our unconscious connection with all living and nonliving things. It evokes feelings of oneness, of continuity, equality, and balance. An unending cycle with no sides, only progress and connection.



BACKGROUND: THE RIVER SISTERS CIRCLE

The River Sisters Circle (RSC) flows from a 2018 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by Mayors Michael B. Hancock and José Enrique Reina Lizárraga establishing a Bi-national partnership between the peoples of Denver, Colorado, and San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora, Mexico. Two distant cities, whose fates are equally tied to the Colorado River. Beginning in 2019, RSC partnered with residents of Sun Valley, the Denver Housing Authority and the City in their *community driven master redevelopment plan* to revitalize the neighborhood (a 10+ year planning process) and create a new riverfront park.

RSC continues to use the established authentic community driven process in designing and implementing a "Turquoise Necklace," a Riverwalk concept along a rediscovered South Platte River in Denver. Our goal is to "heal" our sister, the River, and ourselves, by building access and restoring the health of Denver's only River and our open spaces, while expanding creative, cultural, educational, and economic exchanges, locally and beyond.

THE TURQUOISE NECKLACE CONCEPT

The *Turquoise Necklace* continues a story as ancient as water and snow. Like the Circle, Turquoise has been revered for its mysteries. It was valued by the Aztecs more so than gold and offered to the goddess of ground waters, Matlalcueye. Among the Diné Nation (Navajo), Turquoise was grinded with coral to summon rain and a symbol of good fortune. Together, the *River Sisters Circle* and *Turquoise Necklace* awaken our connection to and dependence on rivers and to each other, while honoring and caring for the Rivers and the Earth.

The Opportunity for Denver

- To become a global leader in climate disaster mitigation and restoration.
- To become a transnational city with actionable environmental and cultural exchanges with Mexico.
- To create healthy river and land spaces where Denver can gather for stewardship, recreation, learning, healing, and community building.
- To immortalize the presence and achievements of Indigenous, Mexican, and Chicano peoples throughout our beloved City's history, sharing, and celebrating these cultural connections widely.



If you are interested in learning more about, and supporting the River Sister initiative, please contact:

Nita Gonzales, nita@nuevoamanecer.biz

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EMERGENT STRATEGY

1) Grow the River Sisters Circle

Community Anchors

El Laboratorio

Latino Cultural Arts Center

Denver City Partners

Denver Housing Authority

Denver Parks & Recreation

Community Planning and Development

Department of Transportation & Infrastructure

Denver Climate Action, Sustainability & Resiliency

Denver City Council

Denver Collaborators

Servicios de la Raza

Sun Valley Youth Advisory Council

Sun Valley Community Advisory Committee

Sun Valley Community Coalition

Mexico Collaborators

Pronatura Noroeste A.C.

Autonomous University of Baja California

National Water Commission of Mexico (CONAGUA)

San Luis Rio Colorado Professional Association of Architects

San Luis Rio Colorado Association of Writers

ARQCOES Architectural Firm

Rafael Perez Fernandez Urbanism & Architecture

2) Secure Funding for a Turquoise Necklace coordinator within community anchors.

3) Secure sustainable funding for community anchors to deliver community-led, shared projects + programs + exchanges that advance resiliency and regeneration through the celebration and empowerment of the historically denied contributions of Indigenous and Mexican/Chicano knowledge and culture.

4) Identify technical support and funding to develop a proof of concept based on indigenous-based community-engagement and open space design, planning, and construction.

5) Continue inter-generational organizing around community health and environmental stewardship through dynamic conversations and place-making programs.

Next Steps

-Initiate official name change process per DP&R park naming process.

-Re-engage with River Sister MOU signees.

THEMES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- 1) Formally include RSC in West Area Plan.
- 2) Adopt policy statement as an advisory committee.
- 3) Design and implement a shared “kick off” project.
- 4) Secure meetings with key stakeholders for updates.
- 5) Articulate shared values to guide consensus based decision-making.
- 6) Cultivate relationships between the west area and other neighborhoods along the South Platte River connecting to the Sun Valley Park and Weir Gulch, and including the Carpio Sanguinetti, City of Cuernavaca, and Sunken Gardens parks.



River Sisters Partnership MOU Signatories

Michael B. Hancock, Mayor, City and County of Denver

Hon. Alfonso Tambo Cecena, Governor

Cocopah-Mexico Indian Tribe

José Enrique Reina Lizárraga, Mayor, City of San Luis Rio Colorado

Jim Lochhead, Chief Executive Officer, Denver Water

C. Jesus Antonio Navarro Acosta, Director General of the Water, Wastewater and Sanitation Utility of San Luis Rio Colorado

Irene Vilar, Executive Director, Americas for Conservation + the Arts
Osvel Hinojosa, Director of the Water and Wetlands Program, Pronatura Noroeste A.C.

Brian Vogt, Chief Executive Officer, Denver Botanic Gardens

Dr. Jorge Ramirez, Chief of Hydrology, Geophysics and Environmental Impact Department
Autonomous University of Baja California

Rick Sargent, Denver Artist

Manuel Cuen Gamboa, San Luis Rio Colorado Artist

Beth Hendrix, Executive Director, Denver Sister Cities International

Paul Cawood Hellmund, Denver Urbanist

Nancy Saldaña, San Luis Rio Colorado Urbanist.

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