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## Portneuf River Vision Study moves forward

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POCATELLO — City residents are being asked to comment on a Portneuf River Vision Study being completed to identify challenges and explore future opportunities for the small river that runs through the Gate City.

City staff, including Science and Environmental Division Manager Hannah Sanger, met with the City Council last Thursday to provide an overview of progress on the vision study. City residents are invited to attend a community open house on the study to be held Feb. 9 from 4 to 7 p.m. at Pocatello Community Charter School, 995 South Arthur Avenue.

During the Jan. 10 study session, Sanger provided council members with a history of the Portneuf stretching back from the 1800s to today. The study seeks to answer the questions of how to restore the river and enhance the tourism, economic development, fish and wildlife habitat, recreation and other quality of life benefits that the Portneuf River provides.

“The Portneuf River can be a wonderful asset to this community,” Sanger said. “We’d like to know what is important to Pocatello residents in terms of activities, look and overall direction the community would like to see as we manage this resource.”

City residents can review facts about the Portneuf River Vision Study online at [river.pocatello.us](http://river.pocatello.us) and are asked to answer a short survey covering river restoration projects in other communities at [river.pocatello.us/comment](http://river.pocatello.us/comment). Officials are also asking residents to provide their own feedback on the future of the Portneuf River.

Other community meetings will be held throughout the year, and input will be used to help shape a draft of the Portneuf study by early summer. The finalized version of the study will be presented to the City Council for adoption later this year.

The headwaters of the Portneuf River originate on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation north of Chesterfield Reservoir. Water captured in the reservoir is then released downstream into the Downey Canal, which extends for eight miles before it becomes a meandering river system again.

Downstream irrigation diversions occur with both the Downey and Portneuf Marsh Valley canals upstream from Pocatello. Near Inkom, Marsh Creek flows into the Portneuf River, and Marsh Creek has traditionally contributed to much of the run-off sediment in the river from that point downstream.

Once the river reaches Pocatello, it is confined to a system of levees and a concrete canal. During rainstorms and winter runoff, the Portneuf River in Pocatello receives untreated storm water runoff.

Before the Portneuf River reaches the upper stretches of American Falls Reservoir, it is recharged by springs on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. According to the study, the spring water contains elevated levels of phosphorus because of historic operations at FMC and Simplot.

The city website on the Portneuf River system provides overviews of challenges and opportunities for the section of the river south of the city, the concrete channel section in town and the river itself as it flows to the northwest.

The levee and concrete canal sections of the river were completed as an Army Corps of Engineers project beginning in 1966 following serious flooding of the river valley in Pocatello during the springs of 1962 and 1963.

Last summer, Army Corps Walla Walla District Commander, Lt. Col. Timothy Vail, made a personal inspection of the Portneuf River system in Pocatello.

Vail said projects done by the Army Corps to reduce flooding threats decades ago are now undergoing study to see if modifications can be made to improve water quality, reduce sediment, improve habitat and improve conditions for fish.

“Some of this impacts economic opportunity,” Vail told the Journal last year. “Now we’ve got enough science and technology that we can do something.”

It is with this new perspective from the Army Corps that the city is moving forward with a vision study for the Portneuf River.

As part of the Managing Idaho Landscapes for Ecosystem Services (MILES), a statewide National Science Foundation project funded by EPSCoR surveys were sent out last year and most people in Pocatello responding said they would like to see the river returned to its natural state.

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