Summary Report

COULSON PARK
MASTER PLAN

February 1995

Prepared for:
City of Billings
Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
Department

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Billings, MT   Jackson Hole, WY   Flagstaff, AZ   Lubbock, TX   Bozeman, MT
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I. Existing Conditions
Coulson Park is a nearly 50-acre city park located on the northwestern banks of the Yellowstone River, in the shadows of the rimrock area known traditionally as Sacrifice Cliff. It is bordered along its western boundary by Interstate 90, which cuts across the park near its northern end, leaving a small, isolated portion of the park adjacent to the Farmers Union tank site. The northern end of the park culminates at a point at the mouth of the Yegen drain ditch, just before reaching the Burlington-Northern Railroad right-of-way. The property line at the southern end of the park extends from the Yellowstone River shoreline along the Montana Power Property to the I-90 right-of-way fence. A pie-shaped piece of land adjacent to I-90 juts into the body of the park southwest of the river bridge. This sliver of land was orphaned from a larger parcel when the highway was constructed and unfortunately it went into private ownership rather than being purchased for the park. Access to the park is from South 27th Street or Garden Avenue and Charlene Street. This park will become an integral link of the proposed Yellowstone River Greenway trail system. It is an area rich in history, being near the original townsites of Coulson which predates the city of Billings. It also has the dubious distinction of being an old landfill site. Coulson Park is essentially undeveloped. There is a vault toilet structure on-site, and the area is badly scarred with vehicle tracks.

Trees on the site are typical of riparian habitat, with cottonwoods being the predominant species. Seasonal channel islands appear adjacent to the park shoreline, which adds to the scenic quality. Though the river is an ever-changing entity, and streambank erosion is always a possibility (especially during spring run-off) there is not much evidence of encroachment into the park at this time. That doesn't mean it will always be so, and any development must take that into consideration.

In summary, Coulson Park is an important part of the Billings city park system because it is highly visible to visitors entering the city on I-90 and it should be developed to portray a pleasing first-impression. It also is an area of historical significance, as well as being one of the few places besides Riverfront Park where people can get close enough to the Yellowstone to enjoy a "river experience". The lack of existing facilities and amenities offers a virtual clean-slate to develop this park into a real showpiece. As with all current park development, improvements must be designed to meet ADA and CSPC Standards to promote safe access and use by all. New National Park and Recreation Association Standards dictate using a community-needs input process which was utilized to gather data to plan development at Coulson Park.
III. Public Input and Master Plan Development
Several advertised public meetings were held to assess community development priorities for improvements at Coulson Park. At the first public meeting participants were given an overview of existing park conditions and were asked to compile a list of improvements they would like to see incorporated into the park. They prioritized their "wish list" and this served as the basis for a preliminary Master Plan concept prepared by the design staff, with additional input from city park department personnel. General consensus was to keep the park as natural as possible, while enhancing its appearance with landscaping. It was proposed to use tree groupings near the freeway fence to help screen the noise and view of the freeway from the park. It was pointed out that this would also serve to frame intermittent views of the park, with the river and cliffs in the background, for the freeway travelers.

It was pointed out that since Coulson Park is utilized as part of the Peaks-to-Prairies race, adequate parking for up to 1,000 cars is needed. Also launch and landing areas should be provided for non-motorized boats. A multi-use trail system with trailhead parking and restroom facilities has already been suggested by the River Greenway project.

Several picnic shelters with barbecue facilities and adequate restrooms were wanted. Participants decided that this park should not have any organized sports fields, but an open-space lawn area would be provided. Other suggestions included having a freeway rest area developed with access into the park, developing an amphitheater or artist's point area, or developing some type of commercial venture with a related historical theme (i.e. a recreation of the old Josephine paddleboat to be used as a restaurant).

Concerns and constraints discussed at the public meetings included the problem of limited access into the park, musing about possible hazardous contents of the landfill, and concern about future shoreline erosion or changes in the river channel. It was suggested that the city try to negotiate purchase or land trade for the billboard property that encroaches into the park and detracts from the natural setting.

A local kayaking group asked if it would be allowable for them to set up a slalom course on the side channel between the big island and shoreline of the park. This was viewed by other participants as having minimal impact on the park and there were no objections to such a venture. It was seen as being usable predominantly during the spring high-water months.

The refined preliminary Master Plan was reviewed one more time at a public meeting before it was sent to the City Park Board for approval. The accepted plan for development at Coulson Park appears following this section.
V. Preliminary Cost Estimate Summary

A preliminary cost estimate has been prepared for Park and Recreation Department use as a guideline for project budgeting and phasing purposes. A summary of that estimate follows:

1. Demolition $ 4,750.00
2. Earthwork $ 571,982.50
3. Fencing $ 20,600.00
4. Trail System $ 138,750.00
5. Site Amenities $ 337,400.00
6. Electrical/Utilities $ 50,000.00
7. Lawn $ 165,366.00
8. Irrigation $ 489,280.00
9. Hardscape $ 627,287.50
10. Plant Material $ 105,260.00
    Total $ 2,510,676.00
10% Contingency Fee $ 251,067.60
Grand Total $ 2,761,743.60