

The Salt Lake Tribune

New Emphasis to be Placed on Jordan River By Jeremiah Stettler

Adriaan Boogaard was a regular Huck Finn along the Jordan River, building rafts, chasing snakes and even skipping school to play along its banks.

That was 30 years ago. But Boogaard hasn't lost his love for Salt Lake County's main waterway - now sullied by graffiti, floating trash and a reputation for crime.

He meanders its cottonwood-tree-speckled shores where the honking of geese and thick foliage disguise its location in the state's most-populous county. He speaks of canoeing, bicycling and horseback riding.

Trouble is, the Jordan River continues to dredge up a fouler image in residents' minds - an unfortunate reality that Salt Lake County and Envision Utah hope to change.

Salt Lake County is paddling toward a plan (dubbed Blueprint Jordan River) that could transform the 44-mile waterway and accompanying parkway from dive to destination.

"We're looking at the river becoming the premier regional amenity," said Gabe Epperson, project manager for Envision Utah. "People are actually going to come to Utah to use the river."

Envision Utah will stage six community workshops next month, hopefully to change the tide of the urban river by creating a long-term vision for development and recreation along its shores.

For two weeks - starting May 6 - river backers will solicit public feedback from Salt Lake City to Utah County's Saratoga Springs.

Salt Lake County leaders say the resulting plan (which will tap existing research about open space, trails, recreation and water quality) will provide the most-comprehensive guideline for river development in almost four decades.

"The Jordan River is one of our great natural beauties," Mayor Peter Corroon said. "We should treat it with the respect it deserves."

That could mean creating a natural buffer along the river to keep homes from snuggling up to its banks or requiring waterfront developers to build houses that face the stream.

It could mean better boat launches, riverside restaurants and trash cleanup. It even could mean a Zoo, Arts and Parks-style tax to support the river's revitalization.

Plain and simple, it's a "blueprint" for decades of upcoming development, Boogaard said.

"It is all about smart growth," he said. "It is all about doing things better."

A draft of the Jordan River plan is expected by fall - the culmination of a yearlong process that will cost \$200,000 and include three counties and 15 municipalities.

Salt Lake County kicked in the most money, pitching \$80,000 into the project.

"With creativity and leadership," Envision Utah spokesman Kevin Fayles said, "we can turn a sometimes neglected and underappreciated resource into one of the signature elements of the Wasatch Front."

jstettler@sltrib.com