



**FOREST IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AT SOUTH  
PLATTE HOTEL HELPS PRESERVE AND  
PROTECT COLORADO HISTORY  
December 2004**

In its heyday, the South Platte Hotel was visited by the likes of Teddy Roosevelt. Located at the confluence of the North Fork and South Fork of the South Platte River, the hotel was a much sought-after weekend getaway because of its proximity to the wilderness and prime trout fishing. And getting there was just a short narrow gauge railroad ride away.

Today, the historic South Platte Hotel property, which is owned by Denver Water, is no longer open to the public, but the surrounding land is still a popular destination for hikers, rafters, birdwatchers, and fishing enthusiasts whose curiosity about the old hotel—which is now boarded-up and off-limits—sometimes gets the better of them.

Concern for the safety of recreation enthusiasts, and ecosystem and watershed protection prompted Denver Water to invest in a two-acre forest improvement project on the hotel grounds, which is covered by deciduous trees more common to urban areas. This endeavor is just one of many forest management activities being implemented through the Upper South Platte Watershed Protection and Restoration Project, an important component of the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership. Consistent with the goals of the FRFTP to reduce wildland fire risks through sustained fuels treatment, the primary goals of the South Platte Hotel project were to reduce hazards to the public and create wildlife habitat along the South Platte River. However, this project was unique because it required the expertise of an arborist who possesses knowledge about urban trees. With that in mind, in August 2004, Denver Water, along with the Urban and Community Forestry Division of the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), the Colorado Division of Wildlife, and an arborist from The Natural Way, Inc., developed and implemented a forest improvement plan for the hotel grounds.

The improvement plan called for removing ladder fuels on the ground and limbs overhanging the roof of the hotel to create defensible space and reduce fire hazards. In addition, some of the old cottonwoods along the river were pruned or removed to create a safer environment for the public. Other dead and dying trees, known as “snags,” were carefully pruned and made into nesting sites for birds and mammals. Using newly developed techniques, the snags were converted to habitat specifically designed to attract American kestrels, owls, nuthatches, chickadees, and bluebirds, which also will enrich the recreational experience of visitors to the area.

Next spring, when nesting season begins and migrating birds return to the South Platte, land managers will come back to monitor the impact of their forest restoration work, and visitors will reap the intangible benefits that make this area one of Colorado’s special places. It’s a moment that would make Teddy Roosevelt smile.