

Company named for whitewater park team

Location will be below Sandifur Memorial Bridge

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A Colorado company that has designed more than half the whitewater parks in the country is part of a team that will create one for Spokane, the Friends of the Falls announced Thursday.

Working with David Evans and Associates of Spokane, Boulder-based Recreational Engineering and Planning will design the park in the Spokane River below the Sandifur Memorial Bridge in High Bridge Park. The team also includes GeoEngineers of Spokane and Eastern Washington University's Archeological and Historical Services department.

The park will be created by anchoring native rock into the riverbed below the bridge to form drops and pools for kayakers, rafters, canoeists and others to play in. Picnic and viewing areas will be developed for spectators. The Friends of the Falls group also hopes to improve fish habitat and modify or remove bridge piers to improve safety for boaters, according to a news release.

"We would hope within a couple of months we're well on the way to a preferred design," said Steve Faust, executive director of Friends of the Falls. "That will allow us to really understand what it will take to build this project. That will tell us how much money we'll need."

Friends of the Falls secured a \$400,000 state grant this year to build the park, in addition to raising almost \$45,000 through private donations. Major contributors include Mountain Gear, Global Credit Union, the Spokane Canoe and Kayak Club, the Spokane Regional Sports Commission, WestCoast Hospitality and numerous individual paddlers from around the region.

Faust said the total cost of the park could rise to \$500,000, depending on what type of structure is built.

The design team will be led by Kathy Schultheis of David Evans and Associates, an engineering and environmental planning firm that has completed many projects in and around the Spokane River. Currently, DEA is working on the Monroe Street Bridge rehabilitation project and is doing landscape and habitat restoration work near the city of Spokane's wastewater treatment plant, said Steve Shrope, office manager for DEA.

For the whitewater park, the team first must survey the riverbed to determine what type of in-stream features would work best, considering the Spokane River's size and flow level. EWU's Archeological and Historical Services department will inventory the area for sensitive cultural and historical features, said Steve Emerson, program director. Many important tribal sites already have been recorded in that area, Emerson said. Respecting those sites, he said, should be easy "if they just listen and look at the right maps."

Completion of the project will include involving numerous agencies, including the Department of Ecology, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others. The permitting process is likely to be extensive and involve public hearings.

"This will be a precedent-setting project in the state of Washington," Faust said.

The Friends of the Falls hopes to begin construction of the park by next summer.