



City of Cañon City

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Fourth Quarter 2012 Stormwater Management Program News

This year has been drier than the last few. We seem to have had fewer storm events with less precipitation than in recent years. A quick look at precipitation amounts and dates recorded by the National Weather Service for Cañon City for January through September of 2010, 2011 and 2012 show 61 events recorded in 2010 for a total of 8.44"; 63 events in 2011 for a total of 8.19" and 53 events with a total of 7.61" of precipitation for 2012 (through Sept. 27th). We thought it would be interesting to re-visit times when Cañon had more water than it may have wanted. We took a look back at some historical floods that have happened in this area.

It seems almost ironic that Cañon City would be flooded, as our annual precipitation is only about 13" a year. Most of the records we found about flooding were not from the Arkansas River or Four Mile Creek flowing over their banks, but about flooding caused by localized intense storms which dumped a larger amount of rain over a short period of time. Since the area around Cañon City tends to have sparse vegetation and soils which do not absorb much moisture, many of the creeks and drainage ditches which lead into the city quickly become filled with rushing water. When the river floods it is due mostly to spring snow melt – often augmented by rain, although intense summer rainstorms can also cause flooding. Some of the floods we found articles about since 1881 are listed below.

The first flood we found an account for was from an article in the New York Times, published on August 28, 1881. The article talks about a flood in Grape Creek on August 22 which destroyed railroads, bridges and roads. The article states that Grape Creek reached a height of 15 feet where it entered the Arkansas River. A quote from the article states that "The force of the current was so great at the mouth of the creek that the north abutment of the bridge across the Arkansas was carried out, letting that structure down considerably. ... It is reported, upon what is believed to be reliable authority, that four miles of track in the vicinity of Blackburn and Soda Springs Stations was swept out of all resemblance to a railroad,..."

The next record of flooding comes only from photographs the Stienmeir's gave to the Royal Gorge Regional Museum and History Center who gave us permission to reprint them in this newsletter. The photos show flooding of downtown Cañon City. There is no information on the cause of the flooding.



An August 31, 1896 article in the Rocky Mountain News reports on the train tracks from Parkdale to Cañon City through the Royal Gorge being washed out by flooding caused from cloud burst which raised the level of the Arkansas River to 14 feet.

On August 13, 1903 an article appeared in The Cañon City Record about a storm which occurred on August 5th. The area had received 2.5" of rain in a heavy downpour. Railroad tracks, bridges and culverts were washed out as well as many gardens and fields. The article does not mention the river overflowing, but talks about the rain quickly gathering in the streets and ditches.

August 18, 1909 did see the river overflow its banks. A cloudburst up Texas Creek after several days of steady rain caused a torrent to rush down the river. The 9th Street Bridge collapsed, swung around and lodged on the north bank. The article states that the river bed at that point was widened by about 40 feet from the flood. Homes and businesses along the river were flooded, but no lives were recorded as lost since a warning about the flood had been telegraphed from Cotopaxi.

On August 7, 1919 a cloudburst dropped up to 2.02” on Cañon City in about 90 minutes. Again, the flooding was not from the river. It was reported that the gutters at 6th Street and Main were filled with 14-16” of water. Volunteers and business people with brooms kept most of the water out of the businesses along Main Street.

June 2, 1921 was by far one of the worst floods recorded on the Arkansas River. In Cañon City many streets and bridges were washed out from the river flooding, but the brunt of the destruction was born by Pueblo. Sixty people were confirmed dead with hundreds missing. The downtown of Pueblo was in ruins.

July 5, 1944 saw Four Mile Creek flood due to a cloudburst to the north. It was reported that the County Farm and the State Game Bird Farm suffered heavy damage as well as many other farms in the area. Water was reported to be 3 feet deep along East Main Street. Vine Street also was flooded from the river.

Flooding along Central Ave, downtown, in South Cañon City and the Lincoln Park area from short intense storms occurred in 1950, 1965, 1966 and 1967. A report of a storm in 1974 listed \$380,000 in damages, primarily to the north Cañon City area.

On August 2, 1991 up to 3” of rain fell in 45 minutes after days of rain. North and east Cañon City were the hardest hit, but the flooding extended south to the river. A 15 foot wide by 50 foot long section of South Street between 15th Street and Orchard Avenue was washed away.

On June 21, 1994 0.54” of rain in 30 minutes resulted in some flooding and damage in South Cañon City. On May 17, 1995 north Cañon City was flooded along Central Ave. Rainfall during a 12-hour period was 3.8”. And on August 8, 1996 the same area was flooded again. The official rainfall was 2.15” with reports of up to 5” to the north.

The worst flooding in recent years was on August 6, 1997 when a heavy rain dropped 2” during the morning. Flooding occurred again in north Cañon City along Central and Orchard Avenues. Two young boys were drowned while playing next to a drainage ditch.

And many will remember July and August of 2009, when Cañon City received 4-6” of rain on July 25th, followed less than two weeks later by another storm which dropped 1.42” on August 4th. North Sand Creek, a normally dry creek bed on the west end of town was overflowing, as were most of the streets throughout town.

Localized flooding from the 1960’s on prompted The City of Cañon City and its citizens to pursue efforts to minimize the amount stormwater runoff and its impacts. As a result detention basins were built along the Hogbacks west of North 5th Street, north of High Street and Central Ave and north of the Abbey. These basins help to slow the flow of water to minimize damages from flash flooding. Due to our location and soils though, sudden intense storms or days of extended rain will always result in some runoff which could cause flooding.

We would like to thank the staff of the Royal Gorge Regional Museum and History Center for their invaluable assistance in compiling articles and information about past flood events. If you would like to learn more about floods or the history of our region please visit the Museum and History Center.



Please feel free to direct any concerns or questions to Glenda DeBekker, City of Cañon City Stormwater Program at either grdebekker@canoncity.org or 276-5265. You may also write to The City of Cañon City’s Stormwater Program, P.O. Box 1460, Cañon City, CO 81215-1460.

Stormwater Tip of the Day: For those who perform maintenance and winterization on their own vehicles, make sure oil and antifreeze doesn’t spill or drip on the ground. If a spill does occur clean it up right away using spill absorbent or cat litter. Never use water to wash it down the street. Antifreeze spills, especially, should be cleaned up

right away as they pose a serious poisoning threat to both people and animals. Don’t store old oil or antifreeze, or any other automotive fluid, in open containers. Keep the fluid in closed containers and take it to one of our local automotive supply stores for recycling as soon as possible.