

Boulder County's Comprehensive Approach to Watershed Recovery

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Honor Award: Community Resiliency

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Boulder County*



The September 2013 flood in Colorado was an historic event, with a record-breaking 17.1 inches of rainfall over three days. The devastating impacts of the flood were seen throughout the county, from the small mountain communities, to the urban cities and rural areas. The flood drastically altered Boulder County's waterways. Large debris, channel migration, and sediment aggradation and degradation within creek channels decreased the stability of the county's eight watersheds and increased the vulnerability of the adjacent communities to future floods.

Recognizing that any action taken in the creek has impacts both upstream and downstream, it became clear that a comprehensive approach was needed to address the instability of Boulder County's watersheds. Boulder County developed the Comprehensive Creek Planning Initiative (CCP), which brought together coalitions of local, state, and federal governments, ditch companies, land owners and other stakeholders to develop watershed-level master plans to serve as a road map for flood recovery along the creek corridors. In addition to establishing the coalitions, which now focus on implementing the plans, each study included a customized public and stakeholder engagement process

to identify community values and promote a common vision for watershed recovery, flood risk reduction, and more resilient watersheds throughout Boulder County.



The outcome of the planning initiative was recovery plans for the Little Thompson River, St. Vrain Creek, Left Hand Creek, Fourmile Creek, Fourmile Canyon Creek, Upper Coal Creek, and lower Boulder Creek. All of the master plans established post-flood conditions and prioritized watershed recovery projects. Using information in the master plans, agencies, communities, coalitions, and citizens have begun seeking funds to implement projects. As communities begin to receive funds and implement projects, the groundwork that was laid during the CCP initiative has led to continued partnerships among stakeholders, including coordination on permitting, collaboration on project design, and development of funding strategies.

Recovery of Boulder County's watersheds will take years to complete. With the information gained and the relationships developed by the CCP initiative, the end result will be stronger, smarter, and more resilient watersheds in Boulder County.