

El Paso County April 29-May 2, 1999



Photo Courtesy of the CWCB

Rainfall and Streamflow Data: [click here](#)

Damage Estimate: El Paso County, \$30 million

City Damage Totals:

Colorado Springs, over \$15 million

Manitou Springs, \$4.4 million

Fountain, \$2.2 million

Palmer Lake, \$910,000

Larimer County, \$200,000 (road damage only)

Otero County, \$7.8 million total (\$4.2 million property damage, \$3.6 million crop damage)

Deaths: 0

Meteorology

In late April, a very warm and moist pacific storm system stalled along the Front Range. The system allowed a deep east to southeasterly upslope flow to develop along portions of the Front Range Foothills resulting several days of heavy rain. Several Colorado counties including Larimer, Elbert, Pueblo and Otero experienced heavy rain and flooding.

On April 29, rain fell most of the day over Colorado Springs, Manitou Springs, Pueblo and the surrounding areas. The rain intensified that evening and continued to fall heavily until the afternoon of April 30. Many locations received as much as 8 inches of rain in 40 hours with some receiving more than 13 inches in 48 hours.

The heavy rain in the Arkansas River basin led to widespread, major river flooding along Fountain Creek in El Paso and Pueblo Counties. Heavy rains in the Trinidad area began to flood the Purgatoire, Huerfano, and St. Charles river basins. The flood waters then moved downstream toward Otero County. The flooding along the Arkansas River was the

worst since 1965. Flooding was especially severe between Rocky Ford and La Junta. Heavy rain in the mountains and adjacent plains upstream from Pueblo on the Arkansas River also caused flooding in Custer and Fremont Counties.

In the northern part of the Front Range rains, were intense in Larimer County and western Weld County on April 29 and 30. The heavy rains caused sections of the Cache La Poudre, Big Thompson and South Platte rivers to jump their banks.

Flooding and Damage

Manitou Springs was flooded by nightfall on April 29 when flood waters came rushing out of Williams Canyon. Williams Creek usually runs quietly beneath the sidewalk at Canon Avenue, but it quickly became jammed with debris and broke through the pavement. On April 30, both Manitou Springs and Palmer Park had declared emergencies and residents in both towns were experiencing basement flooding. In Palmer Lake three roads were washed away by runoff from Monument Creek.

A 20-ton boulder crashed into a Manitou Springs home on May 1 after being loosened by four days of torrential rains. On the same day, officials closed Washington Avenue for fear that the road would begin sliding down the hillside which had been badly eroded by the rains. Several roads in the town were damaged or covered with debris after the floodwaters receded. In addition, some homes and business were flooded with water and debris. The four day rain total for Manitou Springs was 12.16 inches. They are the four wettest days on record for April in the region.



Photo Courtesy of the CWCB



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Damage in Colorado Springs included washed out bridges and roads, erosion, debris, flooded homes and broken sewer lines. Several dozen residents and businesses in Colorado Springs experienced damage from basement flooding or raw sewage backups during the storm. Damage to public works and roads was extensive in the Colorado Springs area, all caused by Fountain Creek. A portion of U.S. 24 was closed for three weeks when floodwaters from Fountain Creek undercut the pavement and washed out soil from around a bridge. About half a dozen waste water

pipes broke during the storm. The creek was responsible for breaking a wastewater pipe which allowed more than 60 million gallons of untreated waste water to pour into the creek. Some of the worst damage was done to the regions urban trail system. According to the planning supervisor for the El Paso County Parks Department, “15 years of trail-

building...are just gone.” Sections of the Pikes Peak Greenway were completely wiped out by Fountain and Monument Creeks. Miles of other trails were severely eroded and littered with debris. The total estimated damage, which includes total demolition of some segments caused by creeks caving in, totaled nearly \$2.5 million. In addition, an estimated 100 farms throughout El Paso County suffered damage to crops, structures and irrigation ditches totaling \$4.25 million.

South of Colorado Springs, Fountain Creek knocked loose a power pole near Fountain leaving 12,000 customers in Fountain and Widefield without power for about 24 hours. The creek also threatened homes and business after large portions of stream bank were eroded away by the flood waters. In Pueblo County, roads, irrigation systems, and bridges, were damaged. A few roads were damaged in far eastern Custer County.

By the morning of May 2, up to eight feet of water flooded the north La Junta area as the Arkansas River swelled with runoff from the storm in the Pikes Peak region. The flood forced 350 families to evacuate their homes. Over 250 homes and business were damaged or destroyed in La Junta and another 100 business and homes were damaged or destroyed in the surrounding areas. There was extensive damage to agricultural lands and many irrigation ditches. The Arkansas River channel was significantly altered in several sections and numerous roads and bridges were washed out or destroyed, mostly between Rocky Ford and La Junta.

In northern Colorado on April 30, a trailer park in Loveland was evacuated because of the overflowing Big Thompson. The Cache La Poudre was also out of its banks in several areas between Ft. Collins and Greeley, flooding the basements of several homes in Windsor. In Larimer County, substantial lowland and agricultural flooding was reported with basement flooding and sewer backups in Laporte.

On May 17, President Clinton declared El Paso, Bent, Larimer, Otero, and Weld Counties disaster areas.

Rainfall Data:

Date	Location	Peak Rainfall
4/29	Drake	2.6” in 24 hrs.
4/29	Ft. Collins 9 NW	2.4” in 24 hrs.
4/29	Manitou Springs	1.7” in 3 hrs., 4.7” in 24 hrs.
4/29-4/30	Canon City	4.42” in 24 hrs.
4/30	Colorado Spgs. WSO AP	2.64” in 24 hrs.
4/30	Drake	2.2” in 24 hrs.
4/30	Ft. Collins	2.02” in 24 hrs.
4/30	Greeley UNC	2.1” in 24 hrs.
4/30	Nunn	2.4” in 24 hrs.
4/30	Pueblo WSO AP	2” in 24 hrs.
4/30	Trinidad Area	4-10” in 24 hrs.

Sources:

- The Colorado Springs Gazette, Apr. 30, May 1-9, 11, 14, 13, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25
- Storm Data, May 1999, June 1999