

Pueblo, July 9, 1996

Buffalo Creek, July 12, 1996

Rainfall Data: [click here](#)

Damage Estimate: Pueblo: Crop damage: \$250,000, Property damage: \$2 million. (These estimates include damage caused by severe winds as well as flood damage).

Buffalo Creek: \$521,000, (road damage accounts for \$368,870 of the previous amount).

Deaths: 5

During July 1996, the southern Front Range experienced numerous extreme rain events that resulted in several incidents of flash and urban flooding. One of these incidents, the Buffalo Creek flood, was quite damaging.

The heavy rains began on the evening of July 9 with heavy accumulations in a very short time in the Pueblo and Fountain areas. The city of Pueblo had one day to clean up and was then hit again by another system of slow-moving thunderstorms late on July 11. On July 12, large rain amounts fell directly on top of the Buffalo Creek burn area in southern Jefferson County. A fast moving thunderstorm dropped heavy rain amounts over the area in only one hour.

The July 9 evening downpour in Pueblo caused widespread flooding and roof collapses of three businesses in the city. On I-25, many underpasses were flooded and several vehicles were carried away by the water or submerged. Numerous other roadways in the area were under water and several gravel roads were washed out.

Rains on July 12 produced the most severe flooding of the month. Significant rain fell on the Buffalo Creek area that had been devastated by a 12,000-acre wildfire only two months prior. Very little vegetation was available to slow the water in the burn area. Firefighters and biologists had put down hay bales, logs and seedlings, but they did little to slow the runoff. The water scoured the hillsides, uprooting trees and washing away soil, rocks and roads. Most of this debris was carried by Buffalo and Spring Creeks into the South Platte. As a result, the debris and water raised the river level to 10 feet above normal until enough pressure built up to create walls of water that rushed downstream. The surge left a 12-mile swath of mud, splintered pines and boulders.

The town of Buffalo Creek, about 30 miles southwest of Denver, suffered great damage. The town fire station, which straddled Buffalo Creek, was completely destroyed. A brand new ambulance, which cost \$80,000, was ruined. The nearby community center was ripped from its foundation and shifted eight feet by the floodwaters. In addition, the town's entire water system was ripped out. At least one bridge was destroyed, several roads were closed and a section of Highway 126 was washed out. The floodwaters uprooted trees and utility poles, flooded many homes, and ruined several cars and propane tanks.

Two occurred on July 12 when floodwater blasted down Buffalo Creek. One man died when his truck was swept off Highway 126. Another man was sleeping in his camper that was parked next to Buffalo Creek in Longview and died when it was washed away by the current.

Rainfall Data:

Date	Location	Peak Rainfall
7/9	Fountain	1.4"/1 hr., 1.6"/3 hrs., 3.2"/24 hrs.
7/9	Pueblo WSO AP	1.22" in 1 hr.
7/9	Eastern Pueblo	2"-4" in 1.5 hrs.
7/9	Manitou Springs	2.20"
7/11	Pueblo	Up to 3"
7/12	Buffalo Creek	2"-3" in 1 hr.

Sources:

- The Colorado Springs Gazette, July 14, 15, 25, 27, 1996
- Storm Data, July 1996