



Special Report: Living with Boulder Floods

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Significant parts of Boulder are sited on a floodplain. The city has achieved impressive successes in trying to reduce flood vulnerability, such as purchasing properties at high risk and raising awareness of the threat and how to react to an imminent event. By understanding water and floods, and by giving water and floods the space that they need, it is possible to have flooding without a flood disaster.

Flooding is a normal process where nature seeks to temporarily store excess water, perhaps from storms or snowmelt. When we live by a river, we should expect to get wet occasionally. With the nature of the flash flood expected in Boulder, "getting wet" could mean a 10-foot tumultuous wall of water barreling down Boulder Creek. That water could include mud, tree trunks, vehicles, concrete blocks from bridges and buildings, and the feature which gives the city its name: boulders.

Nature is powerful and we cannot stop such an event. We can make decisions and take actions which reduce the event's impacts. Some suggestions which anyone can do and which people have done:

- Identify areas of the city likely to be inundated along with areas which are relatively safe.
- Learn to recognise signs and warnings of impending floods. Long before danger looms, seek advice on what to do before, during, and

after a flood. Know where to find real-time storm- and flood-related information. Know what warnings the city government can and cannot provide.

- Never enter flood water, whether walking, cycling, or driving. You have a good chance of being swept away and drowning, even in a SUV traversing shallow water.

- Know how to protect, and if possible back up, valuables, including passports, family photographs, computer files, and items of personal value.

- If you live or work in an area likely to be flooded, seek information on how to prepare your property for flooding. If you have limited mobility, what could you do to reach a safer location within 5 minutes and 15 minutes?

- Investigate flood insurance. Do not be discouraged if the insurance agent cannot answer your questions. Tell them to find out the answer. Read and understand the policy before purchasing it, especially the limitations and exclusions.

Snowmelt and storms are not our choices. Where and how we build our communities are our choices, as are actions that we take (or not) to reduce our flood vulnerability. Too much water on land is a natural process. Too much water on land which kills people, causes overwhelming stress, and results in long-term disruption is our choice.

