

Ten Years *After the Flood*

A STORY OF RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE



10 Years Later

CITY OF
LONGMONT
C O L O R A D O

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As a result of people helping their neighbors, business owners and strangers alike, and the City putting together a plan to mitigate and strengthen, the city of Longmont is a stronger, safer and better place to live.

Introduction



Biblical rainfall amounts ...”

– National Weather Service

In September 2013, significant rainfall occurred throughout Longmont and other areas of northern Colorado, causing the St. Vrain Creek to flood. This flood destroyed state highways, bridges and roads, as well as many City utilities. Nearly 2,000 homes and more than \$150 million of damages impacted Longmont, leaving the City and its residents to pick up the pieces and recover.

In response to this natural disaster, City officials, staff and the community joined together in a show of resilience — putting together a complex and detailed plan to rebuild and improve infrastructure, widen creek channels, and reduce the risk of future flooding. These repairs and improvements were made possible with more than 30 disaster recovery grants and \$112 million of federal grant funding, and have helped make Longmont safer and more resilient than ever before.





We have multiple roads into Longmont; all were cut in half, but one.”

- Sandi Seader, Assistant City Manager



DAMAGES ACCRUED



~\$150M

of damage to City infrastructure



~2,000

homes damaged or destroyed



21

road and bridge closures with
no access across the creek



10

miles of trails were
impacted or destroyed



8

park closures



4 OF 5

Longmont water
supplies destroyed

From Day One: *Emergency Response*

On Sept. 11, 2013, Longmont employees and the National Weather Service warned City staff that rainfall levels and creek capacity were at a dangerously high level. The City activated an Emergency Operations Center and began evacuating residents in the floodplain ahead of the disaster.

Staff at the Wastewater Treatment Plant immediately recognized the potential for flooding to campus facilities and shut down certain non-essential processes and buildings to maintain essential treatment processes while reducing potential damage from the rising flood waters. This proactive response saved the City from an even greater impact by minimizing the amount of damage to the treatment plant site, saving the City millions of dollars of additional damage and reducing the time to repair the facilities by weeks. Because of this methodical approach, safe and reliable treatment of incoming wastewater resumed within 48 hours of the flood.

The City's immediate response to the threat helped make sure no lives were lost in Longmont during the disaster, but that didn't mean everyone was immediately safe.



100%
of City emergency response resources activated, including the total loss of 1 fire engine


More than 400
rescues of stranded civilians; 64 missing people identified and located.

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

A fully functioning Emergency Operations Center up and running within two hours of the emergency call, eventually fielding more than 10,000 calls. Bilingual employees were critical in getting information out to Spanish-speaking communities with emergency communications, social media and videos.

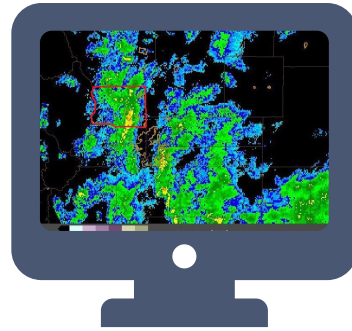
City employees went door-to-door to make sure residents were evacuated before the flood hit.

The biggest accomplishment was the willingness of all City staff to work together no matter current assignments to meet the needs of the residents.”

– Robin Ericson, Senior Communications Manager, Longmont Department of Public Safety

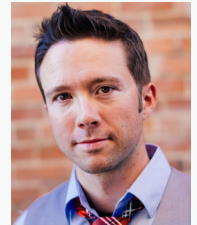
300,000

webpage views within 15 minutes
of the emergency activation,
leading to more than 4.3 million
social media impressions



“Longmont had all the right people in the right places at the right time to make recovery go well.”

– Peter Gibbons, City of Longmont Recovery Officer





It was this community that prioritized this recovery and made it so successful.”



- Wayne Tomac, Neighborhood Resource Coordinator

Recovery and Resilience

As the flood rushed through Longmont, it significantly damaged some communities more than others. Nearly all of the Royal Mobile Home Park was destroyed, making at least 50 families homeless, while another approximately 30 homes were damaged at the St. Vrain Mobile Home Park. City staff stepped up to care for these residents — finding them new homes, helping to rebuild their lives, and making resources available to all.

The St. Vrain Memorial Building and the Longmont Senior Center became shelters for individuals, families and their household pets until people could find more permanent housing.

The Disaster Assistance Center was set up in the old Twin Peaks Mall. Many animals — both livestock and domestic pets — were rescued and saved during the disaster.

Neighborhoods also came together in support of those affected. Instead of competing for the \$50,000 in neighborhood grants available every year, Longmont neighborhoods proposed that the money be distributed among the four neighborhoods most severely impacted by the flood. Longmont residents donated blankets, clothing and food, and helped clean and remove debris from damaged homes for those in need throughout the community.



OVERCOMING LANGUAGE BARRIERS

City staff accompanied FEMA door-to-door to provide Spanish interpretation and local representation, as well as translated on-the-spot all critical materials to Spanish during recovery.

FOCUSING ON HOUSING

City staff elevated and understood the importance of cultural brokers in our communities and developed connections to help people recover and access resources (still in use today) including expanding the City's mediation services to help renters out of leases and save belongings.

The City also sheltered and provided recovery resources to those affected in cities and towns throughout Boulder County.



SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY AT-LARGE

- A county-wide assessment, Resiliency For All (Resilencia para Todos), was initiated to identify barriers and provide recommendations to all agencies to build resiliency within under-served communities. This also proved vital multiple years later during the COVID-19 pandemic. 
- National and statewide attention for best practices that other organizations are replicating for regular operations and in times of disaster.
- Led an intensive evaluation process of unmet needs, where more than \$1 billion was identified across all areas. City staff connected as many of the unmet needs as possible with funding sources, but all available funding has been exhausted, illustrating the need to be more resilient to future climate shocks and stresses.

Funding the Recovery



THE BOULDER COUNTY COLLABORATIVE

Cities and municipalities in Boulder County areas impacted by the flood came together to form the Boulder County Collaborative. The group's goal was to decide as a region how to allocate and prioritize the emergency funds from the Housing and Urban Development, Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (HUD CDBG-DR) that had to be dispersed.

Longmont took the lead as the fiscal agent of this collaborative partnership that also included Boulder County, the Cities of Boulder, Lafayette and Louisville and the Towns of Jamestown, Lyons and Nederland.

TOGETHER, THEY ACCOMPLISHED THE FOLLOWING:



\$76.4 M

was dispersed to affected cities and municipalities



451

new affordable housing units were built (\$16 million)

126

households were helped with rental and down payment assistance, and home rehabilitation costs (\$6.3 million total)



52

flood-damaged property buyouts were initiated

41

public infrastructure projects were funded, including the Resilient St. Vrain Project (RSVP); 30 private bridges and roads were reconstructed



31

households were supported with permanent relocation

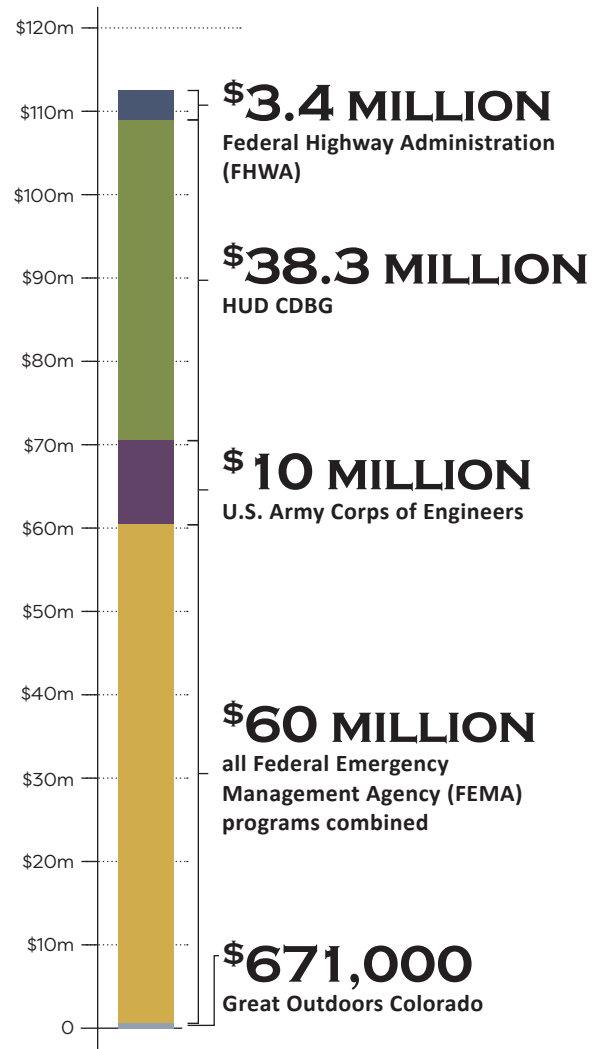
FUNDING CHALLENGES

Funding is one of the biggest challenges in a disaster recovery. Longmont’s approach to involve its funding partners as vital members of the community while forming specialized, interconnected teams to integrate all potential contributions together in a system-wide recovery was innovative. The collaborative approach helped to optimize and reduce risk of losing funding, while also being able to actively seek and obtain vital funding from other partners.

Without these partners, Longmont’s extensive recovery success would not have been possible. Our partners and their immense contributions to the City’s recovery include more than \$112 million.

Behind the scenes, City staff has been working together on this recovery for 10 years and will continue to fund resiliency and mitigation projects for many more. The positive impact of this recovery process has included benefits to City budgets, tax and fee structures and utility costs.

- All grants from FEMA were closed out in less than 10 years
- Administered 34 FEMA infrastructure disaster recovery grants
- \$54.8 million in FEMA Public Assistance grants were successfully administered
- 100% rate of FEMA funding retention



Our staff’s intimate understanding of FEMA’s rules and regulations has been invaluable. Knowing what to include — and, equally important, what to exclude — has provided immeasurable cost savings to the City of Longmont.”

– Nancy Passot, Senior Recovery Accountant



Pre-flood, the St. Vrain Creek was ordinary, maybe less than. Now, it's extraordinary."

- Steve Ransweiler, Senior Project Manager, Parks, Open Spaces and Trails

Longmont's disaster recovery team created the Resilient Design Performance Standards in partnership with the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST). This tool has put Longmont in the national spotlight with many invitations to share the tool with local jurisdictions around the country.

ENVIRONMENTAL RECOVERY

In addition to the infrastructure repair, restoring the ecological function of the St. Vrain Creek and surrounding wildlife habitats was a critical goal of the recovery. City staff evaluated the impact projects would have on the wildlife habitats, while also renewing and revitalizing City open spaces, parks, trails and greenways for residents' enjoyment.

- More than 135 acres of native seeding, sod and wetlands added
- More than 22,000 different types of shrubs and trees planted
- Removed aquatic barriers on St. Vrain Creek to allow more native fish species to move up and downstream



The ability of the City to react quickly to ... enhance the ecology of the creek and limit the impacts ... is truly remarkable."

- Jim Krick, Ecosystem Manager

INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIR AND REDESIGN

Repairs to most areas damaged by the flooding were reopened within three years. The City added projects that have been completed or are currently underway to fully restore the St. Vrain Greenway and improve the St. Vrain Creek channel to protect people, property and infrastructure from future flood risk.

The following projects are some of the many within the Resilient St. Vrain Project (RSVP) that have been completed or are currently underway to accomplish the City's goals:

- Sandstone Ranch Nature Area and the surrounding open space areas were fully restored in 2018 after significant damage to creek banks, trails and wildlife habitats
- The St. Vrain Creek channel is being widened from the confluence of Left Hand Creek on the east side to Hover Street on the west to accommodate flood flows.
- Dickens Farm Nature Area opened in 2020 to provide recreation opportunities while also serving as a basin for future flood waters. More than 10 miles of trails have been repaired for additional recreation opportunities.
- Several bridges have been rebuilt wider and longer to allow for increased flood flows
- Made substantial improvements to multiple pieces of infrastructure including water and sewer lines to make them safer and more resilient during future flood events
- Through re-channeling the water conveyance facility of St. Vrain Creek, more than 800 acres and 500 structures will be removed from the mapped 100-year floodplain, according to the full RSVP Master Plan.





GRATITUDE AND FORTITUDE FOR THE FUTURE

The flood of 2013 was a catastrophic event that affected thousands of Longmont residents, businesses and City infrastructure. The impacts continue to be felt to this day.

But the way the community reacted was truly remarkable. As a result of people helping their neighbors, business owners and strangers alike, and the City putting together a plan to mitigate the floodplain, strengthen and widen the creek channels and install more effective infrastructure, the City of Longmont is a stronger, safer and better place to live. We thank all of you for your assistance, kindness, patience and resilience over the last 10 years. And we thank our volunteers, donors, non-profit organizations, neighboring municipalities and funding partners for their help in this recovery. We couldn't have been as successful as we were without you supporting us.

As the City has made tremendous efforts to lessen severe flood impacts in the future, there is still potential for flooding in our City. Anywhere it rains, it can flood. Understand your flood risk by visiting bit.ly/longmont-are-you-in-a-floodplain. Then learn how to prepare and protect yourself in case of future flooding risk and see if you need to get flood insurance.

