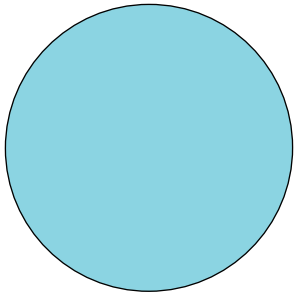
CONNECT THE DOTS

MAPPING THE HIGHWATER HAZARDS AND HISTORY OF BOULDER CREEK

Mary Miss
2007
Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art,
'Weather Report: Art and Climate Change'

The process of focusing on an ephemeral event outside memory or experience produces an alternative kind of map of the city. Rather than claiming property or territory, it uses the infrastructure of the city–its bridges, stairs, streets and buildings–to create a three dimensional map which makes apparent the ever changing presence of water. Instead of an abstraction, it is a mapping that makes apparent the constancy of change.

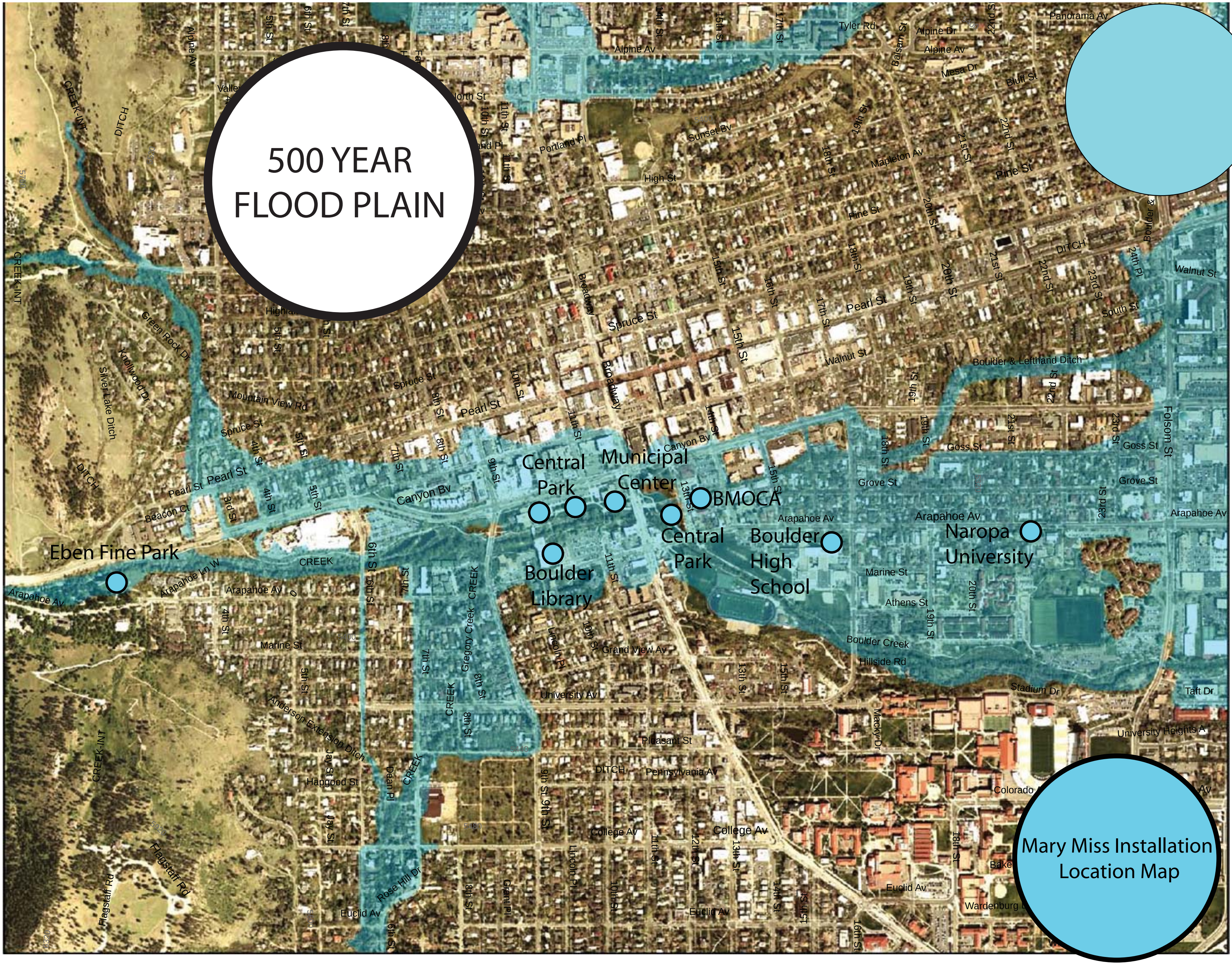
This project is intended to bring attention to the possible flooding of Boulder Creek. It suggests some of the issues to be considered and how this information might be revealed. A fully implemented project would deal with these points and others in detail; it would be an ongoing collection of information involving experts in the field as well as the observations of the residents of Boulder

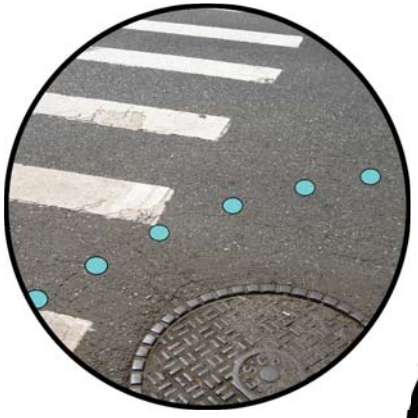


In the spring of 1894, a 100 year flood event occurred in downtown Boulder. Flash floods in Boulder Creek caused widespread damage as the city was inundated. Smaller floods have occurred in 1914, 1919, 1921, 1938 and 1969.

The 100 year flood is used by FEMA to regulate flood plain management. **Many experts believe it would be prudent for communities to be prepared for a 500 year flood event.** A 100 year flood has 1% chance of occurring in any given year, a 500 year flood has a .2% chance of occurring. It is possible for two or more such events to occur in a single year. New weather patterns make the forecasting of such events less predictable: Hurricane Katrina had a .25% chance of occurring.

The city of Boulder is located at the mouth of Boulder Canyon. Because of its location, the nature of the steep slopes and long approach upstream the city is highly susceptible to flooding. The city is considered to be a high hazard zone where the question is not if there will be a flood but when will it happen.


500 YEAR
FLOOD PLAIN
Eben Fine Park
Central
Park
Municipal
Center
BMOCA
Central
Park
Boulder
Library
Boulder
High
School
Naropa
University
Mary Miss Installation
Location Map



THE PROJECT

How can the imagination be provoked to envision an event outside our daily experience? How can the predicted flooding of Boulder Creek be made tangible to the residents of this city?

Downtown Boulder, from Eben G. Fine Park to Folsom Street, is the focus of this project. A series of modest scale elements will be integrated into the fabric of the city to help residents better understand the nature of floods. As residents go about their daily lives, they will come across fragments of information which, over time, will give them a clearer sense of their relationship to this aspect of their immediate environment.

A three-dimensional mapping of the 500 year floodwaters' predicted depth and extent is marked with circular blue discs:

- Along Boulder Creek, blue circular markers are attached to trees and fences to show the height of the water during a 500-year flood.
- Various buildings in the floodplain such as the Library, Boulder High School and Municipal Building also have highwater marks.
- Large boulders that were moved by pre-historic floods are marked with blue dots.
- Blue dots marking the 500 year floodplain limit are painted on the side walks and streets at key intersections.
- GIS (Geographic Information Systems) is used to reveal detailed information about the watershed, Boulder Creek, its potential floods and its history. Data could be updated as needed.

Looking from one point to the next, connecting the dots, the level and extent of a flood is no longer abstract.


HIGH SCHOOL
1604


1000
CANYON GALLERY