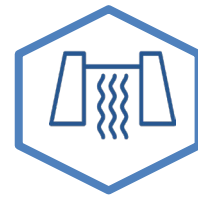


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*DRAFT for Review & Comment***SECTION 2: HISTORY OF THE CHERRY CREEK WATERSHED**

The Cherry Creek watershed is one of the most dominant geographical and cultural features of the Denver metropolitan area. The creek connects communities in Denver, Arapahoe, and Douglas counties. For centuries this connection was used by Native Americans, trappers, traders, and adventurers. Today some of this history is preserved in historic stage stops along the trail that generally follows Parker Road: the 17-Mile House in Arapahoe County, the 12-Mile House Park in Cherry Creek State Park, and the 4-Mile House in Denver. The area also supported the first lumber industry and the initial purebred cattle industry within the state.

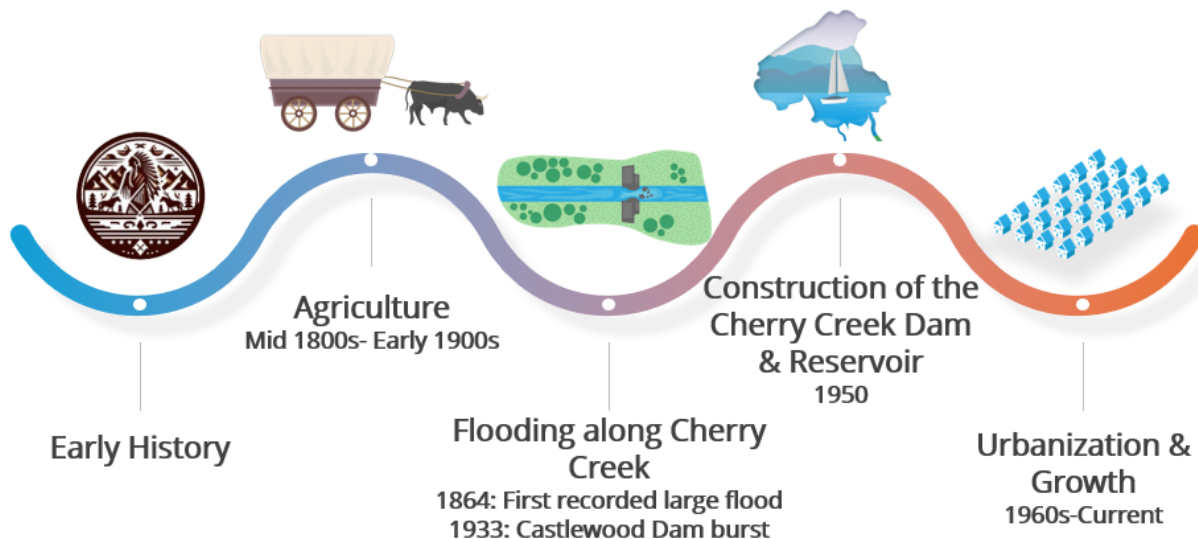


Figure 2-1. Cherry Creek Basin Watershed Timeline

2.1 EARLY HISTORY

Present-day Arapahoe County was the territory of the Arapaho and Cheyenne indigenous people by the early nineteenth century. They formed an alliance in the early 1800s and hunted bison and other wild game in the area. The dense Cottonwood trees along Cherry Creek provided seasonal shelter and other food sources.

In the mid-1800s, trappers, traders, and pioneers traveled through and started to settle. Then the Gold Rush brought a massive wave of settlers to the Cherry Creek Area. During this time,

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the depletion of water and grazing lands lead to conflict and displacement of the indigenous inhabitants from the area.

The watershed gained agricultural importance from the late 1800s through the 1930s, due to its rich soils and flat lands. There were numerous dairy farms, truck farms, orchards, and potato fields from Franktown to downtown Denver. Water was supplied from Castlewood Reservoir, built in 1890. Originally the plan was to provide water to irrigate about 30,000 acres of farmland downstream.

2.2 EARLY HISTORY FLOODS AND CONSTRUCTION OF CHERRY CREEK DAM AND RESERVOIR

Though early settlers in the region were warned of the potential for flooding along Cherry Creek by the Arapaho and Cheyenne people, early Denver grew along its banks and was subsequently flooded several times. One of the first recorded large floods in the basin occurred in May 1864. This flood originated in the upper end of the Cherry Creek and Plum Creek watersheds when a snowy winter, heavy spring rain, and a violent thunderstorm caused a flash flood and a six-foot wall of water came down the creeks destroying structures including the Larimer and Blake Street bridges, Denver City Hall, and the offices of the Rocky Mountain News. The flood killed 15 to 20 people.

On August 3, 1933, the Castlewood Dam burst after several days of torrential rain. This released a wall of water into Cherry Creek, as high as 20 feet in spots, eventually reaching Denver. The remains of Castlewood Dam can still be seen at Castlewood Canyon State Park. The Castlewood flood was the impetus for building the Cherry Creek Dam and Reservoir.

The Cherry Creek Dam was signed, constructed, and operated by the US Army Corps of Engineers and was the first of the three Tri-Lakes project that includes Cherry Creek, Chatfield, and Bear Creek Reservoirs. The dam was constructed in the early 1950s to protect downstream areas from the catastrophic floods that had plagued the area for more than 100 years. During the 1965 Denver flood, high upstream flows from Cherry Creek were stored in Cherry Creek Reservoir, which helped mitigate the flood and protect Denver and downstream infrastructure from additional damage.

The Cherry Creek Watershed tributary to the Reservoir is approximately 386 square miles and contains 600 miles of creeks and streams. The Reservoir is approximately 880 surface acres (~1.4 square miles) at pool elevation.

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2.3 FORMATION OF THE CHERRY CREEK BASIN WATER QUALITY AUTHORITY (CCBWQA)

The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) completed a Clean Lakes Study of Cherry Creek Reservoir in 1984. The study found that Cherry Creek Reservoir's water quality and its uses were moderately impaired due to nutrient enrichment or eutrophication. Phosphorus was identified as the nutrient responsible for increased algal growth in the Reservoir. As a result, the Colorado legislature authorized creation of the CCBWQA, tasked with improving, protecting, and preserving the water quality of Cherry Creek and the Reservoir, and achieving and maintaining state water quality standards for the Reservoir and related watershed.

The CCBWQA is statutorily charged with improving, protecting, and preserving the water quality of Cherry Creek and the Reservoir, and achieving and maintaining state water quality standards for the Reservoir and related watershed.

The CCBWQA was initially created by an intergovernmental agreement in 1985 and subsequently specially authorized by legislation adopted in 1988. Originally, the makeup of the CCBWQA Board was composed of two counties, four municipalities, and seven water and wastewater special districts. The Colorado Legislature changed the Board's structure in 2001 such that it now includes elected officials from two counties, eight municipalities, one member representing all the special districts, and seven citizens appointed by the governor. CCBWQA is a quasi-municipal corporation and political subdivision of the State. CCBWQA has the power to study, develop, implement, and recommend water quality control plans and projects for the reservoir and watershed.

2.4 POPULATION GROWTH IN CHERRY CREEK BASIN

The basin's population has grown significantly over the past several decades, increasing over 4.5 times in the 30 years between 1990 and 2020 (Figure 2-2), with the majority of the growth being in the northern portion of the watershed closest to the Reservoir. Population increases generally impact water quality due to increased runoff and point and nonpoint source pollutants. However, through strong partnerships with local, state, and federal stakeholders, the CCBWQA has worked to moderate those impacts to the watershed and Reservoir. As shown in Figure 2-3, total phosphorus and chlorophyll-a concentrations in the watershed have not increased at the rate that might have been expected for population growth of this magnitude. Advanced phosphorus removal at wastewater treatment facilities (WWTFs), stormwater quality control measures (SCMs) implemented by local governments, and pollution reduction facilities (PRFs) implemented by CCBWQA have been important measures to control nutrient loading to the Reservoir during this period of rapid population growth.

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More detailed discussion on land use, population and other geospatial information is provided in Chapter 4 of this plan. These basin characteristics are key considerations in understanding sources of pollution in the watershed and corresponding management strategies.

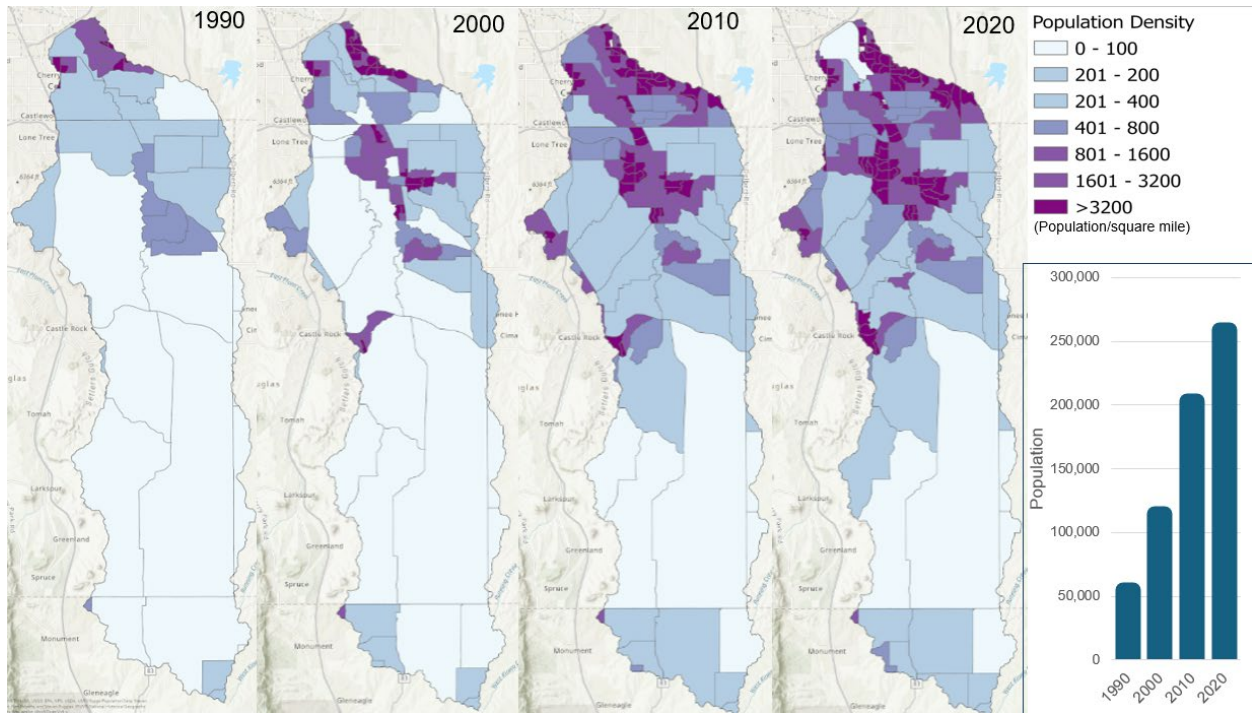


Figure 2-2. 1990-2020 Cherry Creek Basin Population per Square Mile by Census Block

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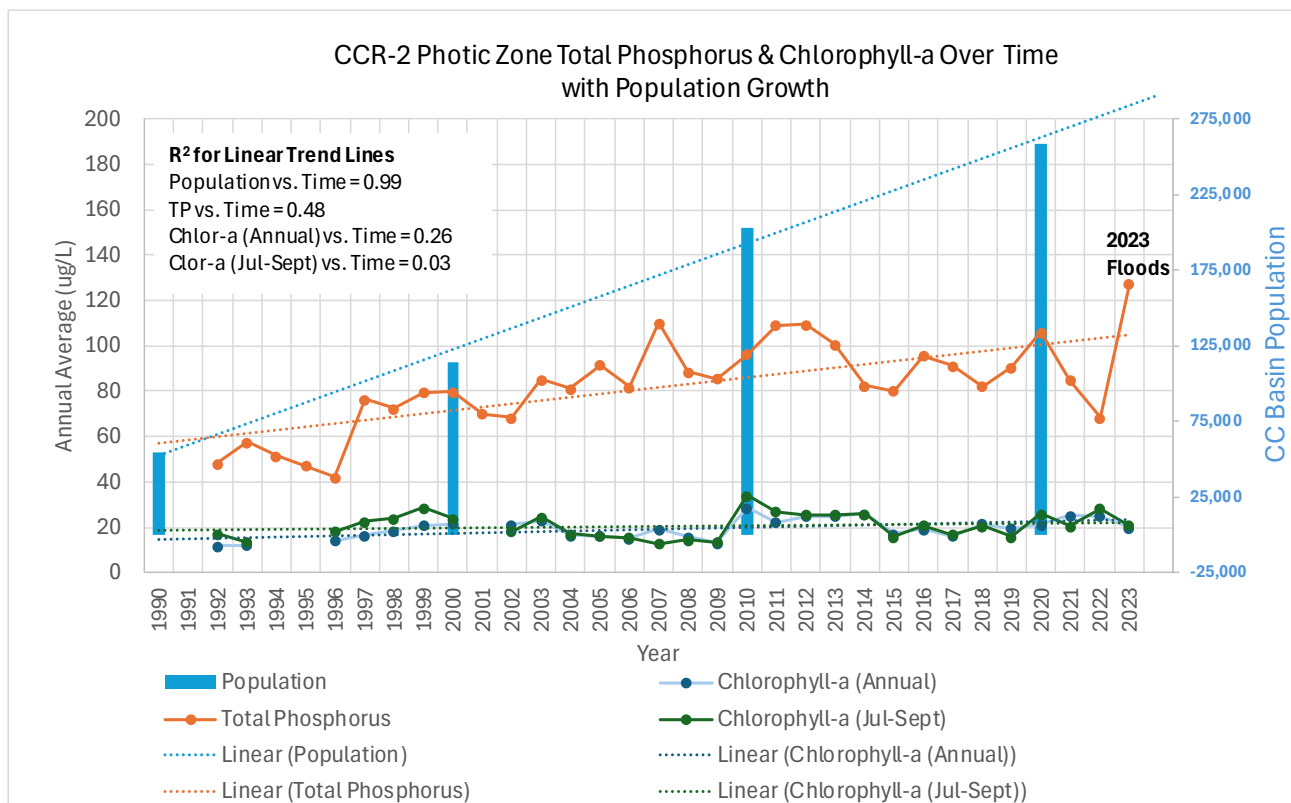


Figure 2-3. 1990-2020 Changes in Total Phosphorus in Cherry Creek Reservoir (CCR-2) Over Time with Population Growth

2.5 LEARN MORE

- [!\[\]\(444b1eae2189e5cd8d096594c07a0a6e_img.jpg\) Indigenous Inhabitants of Arapahoe County](#)
- [!\[\]\(b81fe50bc966474a9bf510149094d8e3_img.jpg\) 1933 Castlewood Dam Flood](#)
- [!\[\]\(94faa64fb42ea7f60c43d916dda9de51_img.jpg\) Rising Waters: Flooding and the Auraria Community](#)
- [!\[\]\(83869583ee10f8aa2e9787431ee1ddc1_img.jpg\) Cherry Creek Dam Background Information](#)
- [!\[\]\(c8c4b3ab893e3f5c9fc372d81c022dbd_img.jpg\) Castlewood Dam Background Information](#)
- [!\[\]\(1544eb02c538182c3b92ab34ff13b254_img.jpg\) Clean Lakes Study \(1984\)](#)
- [!\[\]\(d38d890159577c667969d148fb534a48_img.jpg\) Cherry Creek Basin Impervious Areas over Time Animation](#)