From September 11-15, 2013 a late summer monsoonal rain dropped over fifteen inches of rain over the Northern Front Range of Colorado. The St. Vrain Creek, Left Hand Creek, the Poudre River, the Big Thompson River and a number of smaller creeks, rivers, and tributaries swelled and overflowed far beyond their banks causing severe flooding from the small mountain town of Lyons to the plains of Crook, Colorado. The raging water destroyed thousands of homes and businesses, caused billions in property damage in seventeen different counties, and killed eight individuals.

With funding from the Colorado Water Conservation Board, researchers at Colorado State University’s Public Lands History Center have captured the history of this event by conducting 30 oral histories, primarily with water professionals responsible for flood management and recovery. The oral history interviews took place during the summer of 2014. All of the interviews have now been transcribed and digitized. They will be stored permanently in the Water Resources Archives at Morgan Library. In keeping with the CWCB’s mission, the project’s researchers conducted interviews with the goal of eliciting insights and evidence about the 2013 flood that could be used to improve future flood preparation, mitigation, management and recovery. The project’s final report highlights key characteristics of the flood and its impacts, as well as critical lessons learned by water managers and other flood recovery specialists as they confronted the unusual scope and severity of this event. The final report and the interviews themselves are meant to be a resource for water professionals who bear responsibility for preparing for and responding to future flood events, as well as scholars and researchers interested in the historical significance of the 2013 flood event. The report and interviews will also supplement the CWCB’s commitment to document flood damages and flood areas and provide flood-related information to Coloradoans.

The Principal Investigator for the 2013 Colorado Flood Oral History Project was Ruth Alexander, Professor of History at CSU and Council Chair of the Public Lands History Center. The Project Coordinator was Naomi Gerakios, M.A. The interviews highlight the value of training for flood events; the critical importance of communication and networking with professionals and the public in and beyond northern Colorado; the necessity of mutual aid agreements; the important role of new technologies and social media; trends in successful floodplain management; and gaps in flood recovery resources and services.