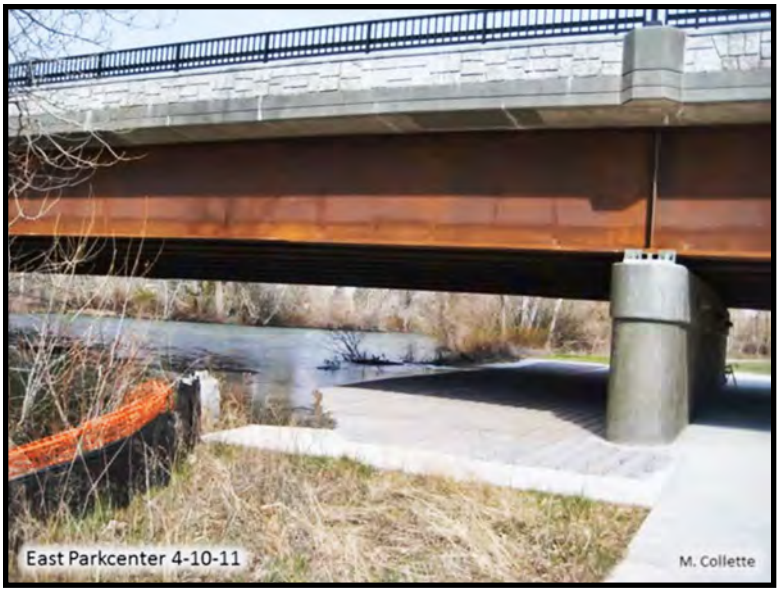
Revitalizing Floods

During high spring flows it's not uncommon for the Boise River to cover sections of the greenbelt paths and other low-lying areas. The paths lie in the river's natural floodplain and are designed to be inundated occasionally. The area under the East Park Center Bridge and portions of the pathways in Marianne Williams Park were designed with concrete sections to withstand flooding.

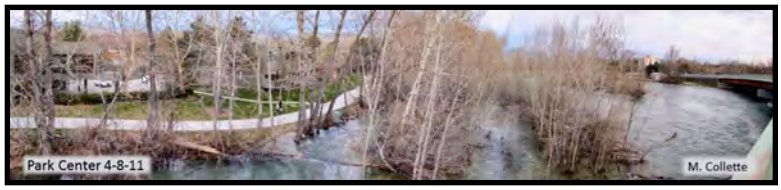
It's critical to allow the Boise River room to overtop its banks and recharge adjacent side channels, wetlands and floodplains. Spring floods are needed for the regeneration of native cottonwood trees, and high water provides important habitat for wildlife, birds, fish and aquatic insects. Riparian areas also enhance water storage capacity and serve as flood buffers.

In the early 1900s, when the Barber Lumber Company's mill and town occupied this area, levees were built along the banks, cutting the river off from its natural floodplain. This caused the water to flow faster through a narrower channel, increasing downstream flooding.

When constructing Marianne Williams Park, the city of Boise removed some of the levees, reconnecting the river with its floodplain. The result: water flowed freely through the park again in June 2012, slowing down, spreading out, percolating into the groundwater and reducing downstream flows.



High water on the Boise River at the East Park Center Bridge, April 8 & 10, 2011. Photos: M. Collette



Water flows over and percolates through these concrete pavers under the bridge. Photo: Jane Rohling