

road manager

by Nancy Shanks and Mindy Crane

Spring Can Mean Winter in the Rockies

Colorado DOT maintenance workers face early and late snows, avalanches, and other unexpected challenges.

Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore." While the changes in Colorado's climate and environment may not be as dramatic as Dorothy's trip to Oz, they often catch visitors — even locals — off guard and unprepared. And severe Colorado storms, like those that pummeled the Front Range this past season, can leave stranded travelers wishing they had a Yellow Brick Road to guide their journeys.

Over the past 10 years or so, Colorado has suffered the same decreasing amounts of snow and rain as other regions. This year brought a big change.

Mother and son storms

When the aptly named *Mother of All Snow Storms* hit Denver and

the state's Front Range three years ago, people were out of the practice of dealing with snow and ice. Vehicles piled up on the roadways, livestock died, and people were stranded, not only on the roads, but in their homes.

Highway maintenance workers from the Colorado Department of

Transportation traveled from all over the state to the Front Range, bringing extra equipment and crews to battle what Mother Nature had not delivered in a long time.

In the 2006-07 winter season, the state got the *Son of the Mother of All Snow Storms*, and as sequels typically go, this was a bad one. In fact, for five weeks in a row, one storm after another rolled through the Front Range and eastern plains leaving behind up to 3 feet of snow and drifts ranging from 12 to 20 feet.

On the roads

These multiple snowstorms put CDOT maintenance crews to the test, as most worked every day for at least five weeks straight.

On the plains of southeastern and eastern Colorado, crews battled whiteout conditions and snowdrifts. These frequently closed the majority of highways in the area, including a 150-mile stretch of Interstate I-70 from Denver to Kansas.

In the Denver metro area, crews dealt with similar conditions, all in the presence of frustrated and impatient motorists. Piles of snow along highway shoulders and ramps had to be removed in order to make room for the next snowstorms.



Photo by Gregg Gargan, courtesy of the Colorado DOT.

Anti-icing on I-25 in Denver keeps streets open for drivers.