

# A Neighbors' Guide

## SOUTH PLATTE PARK *A Natural Area*



## Welcome, Neighbor!

You are among the privileged few to live next door to South Platte Park, a natural open space of regional and national significance. The Park has an amazing wealth of wildlife and nature. Read on to learn about what lives here, how to help protect the Park, and how to get the most out of living nearby!

## The Significance of South Platte Park

In 1965, a flash flood followed an epic rainstorm near Larkspur that dumped 14" of rain in just four hours. A wave of muddy water nearly a mile wide swept through the valley uprooting trees, smashing cars and washing away homes and bridges. The Army Corps of Engineers began building Chatfield Dam in 1967 to protect against future floods, with a plan to channelize the river allowing development up to the river's edge. The citizens of Littleton rallied against the plan to channelize the river, voted to raise their taxes, and sent their representatives to Congress. In the end, they created the nation's first floodplain park. The Park is more than 889 acres today, larger than New York's Central Park. Gravel mining operations left a number of lakes in the valley, and years of restoration work by staff and volunteers created the beautiful open space you see today.

South Platte Park preserves open space along the river and provides a haven for recreational activities and over 300 species of wildlife. It is recognized as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society for winter waterfowl habitat, and as a breeding area for migratory songbirds. South Platte Park has received numerous awards from the Colorado Parks and Recreation Association, the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education, and the Colorado Lottery.







## Join the Fun

South Platte Park offers dozens of opportunities to interact with nature, learn about wildlife, and hike with professional naturalists. You can book nature-themed birthday parties, scout programs, or guided field trips for school classes or homeschool groups. For the complete program schedule and to register, visit [ssprd.org/nature](https://ssprd.org/nature)

## Carson Nature Center

The Carson Nature Center offers exhibits of Park habitats, live animal displays, an interactive river model, maps and trail guides, a gift shop, and access to naturalists and volunteers. Stop in on weekday afternoons and weekends (closed Mondays) with your questions, stories and sightings. The center is a great place to bring family on rainy days, show off to out-of-town guests, and share with friends before a hike in the Park. Admission is free.





## A River Runs Through It . . .

The South Platte River and the Mary Carter Greenway Trail are the focus of most of the recreation in the Park. The river can be fun and requires awareness to avoid danger. Flows are controlled out of Chatfield Dam and can vary widely within a single day. Water quality is generally good. The river flows at extremely low rates much of the year, so please protect this valuable and threatened resource in the Park.

**Fishing** – The entire reach of the river, plus the five lakes south of Mineral are open to fishing. All standard state regulations apply and the only special rule is bass caught south of Mineral Avenue must be 15" or longer to keep.

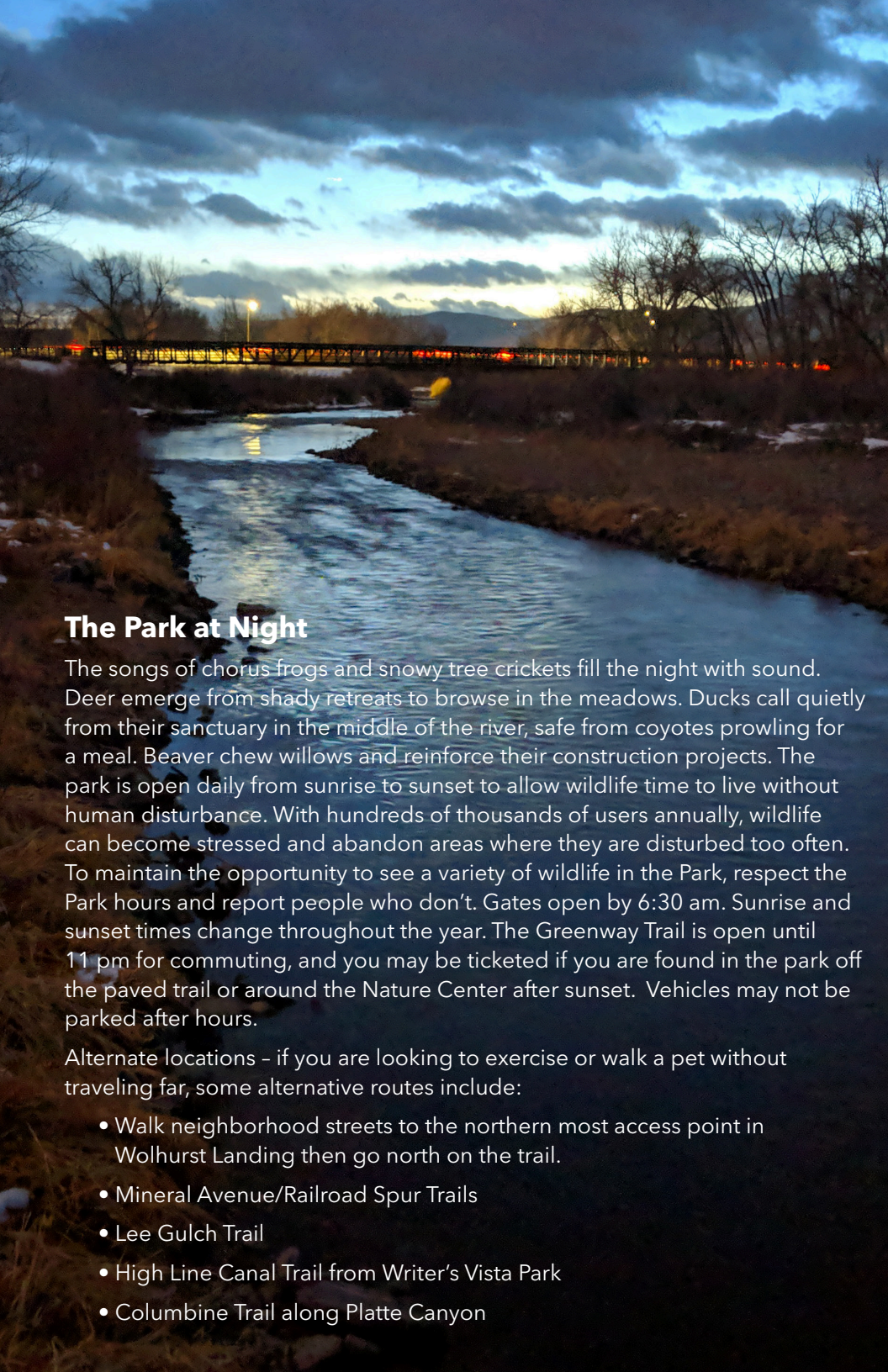
**Floating** – The river can be floated by canoe, kayak or raft at sufficient water flows, generally more than 100 cubic feet per second (CFS). Boats can be put in via the Platte Canyon entrance or the Carson Nature Center, and common take-outs include Reynolds Landing Park, Littleton Golf or Centennial Park at Union Ave. Boats are not permitted on the lakes. Check state boating regulations including: boats are required to be labeled with name and address, have proper safety equipment, and personal flotation devices (PFD) are required for each occupant. Use caution, especially during high flows and when traveling through boat chutes. High water can cause trees to unexpectedly fall across the river causing dangerous "strainer" hazards. Parts of the river can be over 10 feet deep.

**Tubing** – is permitted, and all state regulations also apply. Each tuber should wear a personal flotation device securely fastened and "pool toys" are strongly discouraged. River flows over 400 cfs can be particularly challenging and unpredictable. Be aware of changes in weather—many tubers find they get too cold before the end of their trip. Help protect the river-bottom habitat by floating rather than walking or dragging your feet and give space to ducks and herons you encounter. Note in particular the park rules prohibiting glass, alcohol and rope swings. Floating or tubing are never recommended when flows are 50 cfs or lower. Search PLACHACO to find the current flow levels.

**Water Exploration** – Swimming, bathing, and water play are not permitted in the Park. Youth engaged in water exploration such as seeking crawdads and frogs are permitted, and we encourage a catch and release ethic.







## The Park at Night

The songs of chorus frogs and snowy tree crickets fill the night with sound. Deer emerge from shady retreats to browse in the meadows. Ducks call quietly from their sanctuary in the middle of the river, safe from coyotes prowling for a meal. Beaver chew willows and reinforce their construction projects. The park is open daily from sunrise to sunset to allow wildlife time to live without human disturbance. With hundreds of thousands of users annually, wildlife can become stressed and abandon areas where they are disturbed too often. To maintain the opportunity to see a variety of wildlife in the Park, respect the Park hours and report people who don't. Gates open by 6:30 am. Sunrise and sunset times change throughout the year. The Greenway Trail is open until 11 pm for commuting, and you may be ticketed if you are found in the park off the paved trail or around the Nature Center after sunset. Vehicles may not be parked after hours.

Alternate locations - if you are looking to exercise or walk a pet without traveling far, some alternative routes include:

- Walk neighborhood streets to the northern most access point in Wolhurst Landing then go north on the trail.
- Mineral Avenue/Railroad Spur Trails
- Lee Gulch Trail
- High Line Canal Trail from Writer's Vista Park
- Columbine Trail along Platte Canyon





## The Cooley Lake Area

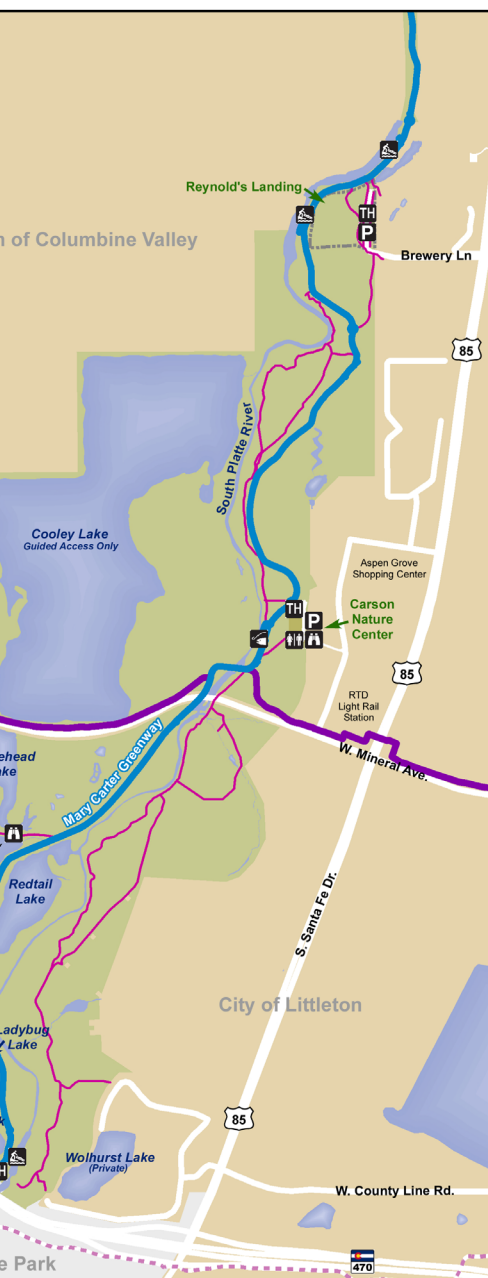
The portion of the Park west of the river and north of Mineral Avenue is managed for wildlife with public access limited to ranger-guided and volunteer activities only. We invite you to explore this area with us by signing up for free walks into the area (second Saturday each month at 9:30 am and occasional Sundays, call 303.730.1022) or canoe programs (ssprd.org/nature). This area is set aside as a habitat area to provide refuge for wildlife easily disturbed by human and pet activity. The habitat area was originally envisioned in the Park Master Plan to be the area south of Mineral Avenue, but was revised in the 1980's to accommodate trails, fishing access and recreation demand. To allow wildlife to come and go, The Cooley Lake Area has minimal fencing beyond the Mineral wildlife barrier. Visitors not respecting the signs will be contacted by law enforcement.

# South Platte





# te Park Map



## Accessing the Park

South Platte Park has several designated access points at parking lots and trailheads. To limit the creation of additional trails and control damage to habitat, use existing trails and do not climb fences or add gates from your yard to access the Park.

## Benefits of Living By a Park

Natural Open Space offers many benefits including:

- Improved air and water quality
- Decreased noise and light pollution
- Water and vegetation reduce summer heat compared to urban street scapes
- Improved views and a sense of space
- Conveyance and filtration of storm water
- Increased property values
- Heightened wildlife watching opportunities

## Park Rules

- Park open sunrise to sunset (Gates open by 6:30 am)
- Trail speed limit is 15 mph
- Wildlife habitat is protected
- Bikes & rollerbladers must stay on designated trails
- Pets must be on a six foot leash
- Non-motorized boating, and in river only
- Horses in designated areas only



# Get Involved as a Volunteer!

South Platte Park has five full-time staff with up to ten more seasonal or part-time staff. The Park is highly dependent upon its loyal corps of more than 100 active volunteers – and we're always looking for more. Benefits of volunteering include:

- Naturalist and interpretation training
- Library and collection access
- Discounts on classes
- Develop career skills
- Contribute to your community
- Develop a sense of place by protecting 'your' park
- Join a community of like-minded individuals
- Connect with nature

## How Can You Help?

Call 303.730.1022 or visit [ssprd.org/nature](http://ssprd.org/nature) to schedule a tour, or fill out an online application.

**Program Assistants** – Lead small groups on the trail helping participants notice and understand nature. Learn to give brief interpretive talks and guide exploration for school groups, special interest groups and the general public.

**Nature Center Hosts** – Greet visitors and create a welcoming atmosphere in the Carson Nature Center. Answer questions, lead exhibit tours, help with live animal care, provide trail information and assist with display projects.

**Stewardship Assistant** – Plant, seed and manage wildflowers, grasses, trees and shrubs to restore native plant communities. Improve trails, construct fences, inventory and map plants. Also assist in the native wildflower garden. Learn ecological restoration techniques. Active outdoor work in variable weather.

**Nature Studies** – Expand your bird identification skills, help with research and spend time with wildlife. Assist with Waterfowl Census in winter, Breeding Bird Atlas in spring, or Nest Box Monitoring in summer.

**Periodic Assignments** – Help with special projects, newsletter mailings, computer entry, and much more on your own schedule.





## Who Does What?

South Platte Park is owned by the City of Littleton and managed by South Suburban Parks and Recreation.

**Snow Removal** – South Suburban Parks and Recreation crews plow the Greenway trail shortly after winter storm events. Our goal is to keep the trail open for use year-round. Nature Center trails and sidewalks

are cleared before the center opens for programs each day. In winter storm emergencies, roads and facilities take precedence, and trails are cleared when possible.

**Weed Control** – South Platte Park staff manage all vegetation within South Platte Park. Do not mow or spray across your boundary fence. Tall grasses are not ‘weeds,’ and they provide important cover for wildlife while keeping true weeds from invading. Where neighbors dump grass clippings or mow natural areas too short, the result is often an invasion of more difficult-to-manage weeds. In addition to mechanical methods, chemical application is used to control some weeds.

**Tree Trimming** – Many of the boundary areas have ‘living fences’ in place. These vegetation fences add to the Park’s feel of being more removed from the city, and helps protect your privacy in your home. Cutting trees or shrubs in the Park is illegal and may result in a citation from the City of Littleton. Contact the Park if there is an issue with the living fence along your border.

**Trail Work** – If you find newly-downed trees across the river or trails, areas of washout, or other trail damage, report it to the Rangers or the Nature Center.

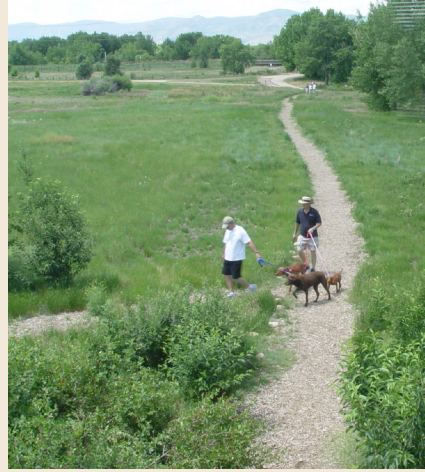
**Forts/Nature Art** – South Platte Park encourages youth to interact with nature and enjoy nature play, while protecting the resources and the wild feel of the Park. Do not dig or damage trees, and anything built (native materials only) should be dismantled the same day.





## Protect your pets . . . in the Park

Pets are welcome in South Platte Park, and must remain on a leash no more than six feet long at all times. Pets off leash have become lost, killed wildlife, encountered skunks, or been injured by wildlife. Some pets have also been injured by other dogs, and have even been injured when approaching people who feel threatened by them. Keep your pet safe by keeping it on a leash at all times. You can find off-leash areas at the nearby Wynetka Ponds Park or at Chatfield State Park. Pets running loose also stress and harass wildlife making it harder to find the abundance of wildlife you see today. Owners with pets found off leash may receive a summons to appear in court, and may also receive a citation for wildlife harassment. Pets found running loose may be impounded by animal control. Please clean up after your pet! Bags and trash cans are located at entrances and other areas along the trails.



## Protect your pets. . . at home

Small dogs and cats should be monitored at all times when outdoors near natural open spaces—even in your yard. Littleton is home to owls, raccoons, bobcats and coyotes, all of which have been known to attack pets or transmit disease, though there have been few incidents around South Platte Park. Free-range cats hunt native birds and mammals, further reducing your chance to see wildlife in South Platte Park. Please keep cats indoors, keep smaller dogs close to you when outdoors, and keep larger dogs from interacting with wildlife.

## Keep 'em wild

Bird feeders can provide joy and interest near the Park and can also attract rodents that feed on dropped seed. Feeding of any other wildlife is not recommended and will increase your chances of attracting raccoons or skunks that can damage your property. It can also make animals like coyotes or foxes become comfortable around humans, which can create dangerous situations. Feed your pets indoors or bring dishes in before nightfall. Keep your yard clean of overripe fruits, vegetables and open compost piles.

## How do I protect my home from . . .

South Platte Park is not responsible for damage caused by wildlife, nor are we trained and equipped to collect problem wildlife. Wildlife issues on public property can be reported to Littleton Animal Control or Colorado Parks and Wildlife. On private property, consider calling a commercial wildlife control company.

**Woodpeckers** – Northern flickers are notorious for pounding on roof vents and siding. Drumming can be prevented by deadening the resonant sound. Flickers create more damage if they start excavating a nesting hole. Completely repair or replace damaged siding, then add wind activated pinwheels or mylar ribbons. You can also add a nesting box over the repair – this approach has successfully limited damage on the Carson Nature Center for years!

**Squirrels, Skunks, Raccoons, Bats** These animals may attempt to den in chimneys, attics, or under porches. They can damage siding and wiring or leave smelly messes. Exclude them with chimney guards, metal screening or landscaping rock. State law prohibits anyone from releasing trapped animals into the Park without written permission.

**Rabbits** – Rabbits find safety from predators in our yards where they end up damaging gardens, shrubs, and turf. Exclude rabbits with mesh fencing or try chemical repellents.

**Prairie Dogs** – Prairie dogs have tried to expand into neighboring lawns. In these areas, we have created “living fences.” If a prairie dog cannot see

the rest of the colony, it is less likely to venture into that area. Help maintain the dense vegetation or barrier fencing that has been installed to keep prairie dogs from your yard.

## What if I find . . .

**Baby Birds** – If it's pink and featherless and you spot the nest, set it back in or create a substitute nest if the original one is damaged. Touching the baby will not cause the mother to abandon it. If you find it on the ground again, let nature take its course. If the baby has feathers, remember that birds often leave the nest before they can fly. A parent may be nearby protecting and feeding the baby. Leave them alone, and ensure no pets can get at the baby, and it should fly within a day or two. Moving the baby might mean the parent can no longer care for it.

**Sick or Injured Animals** – Do not handle or approach wildlife that is acting abnormally. If an animal appears to be suffering, report it to the Rangers, Animal Control, or Parks and Wildlife who will attempt to aid it if the animal can be captured.

Deer Creek Animal Hospital, 303- 973-4200 may provide emergency services for wildlife. Consider donating to help with the costs of treatment or transportation to a rehabilitation center. Injured or abandoned wildlife require 24-hour care and specialty equipment and training. The Nature Center is not equipped to provide care for wildlife in need.



## Who to contact:

### Emergencies - call 911

What constitutes an emergency? Accidents with bodily injury, assault, vandalism in progress, theft in progress, fire, etc. Non-Emergency: To file reports, request information or patrols, after-hours trespass or vagrants, campfires, or request help from Animal Control

Littleton Police non-emergency 303-794-1551

South Metro Fire non-emergency 720-258-8911

Park Rangers 303-435-8227

South Suburban Park Rangers are commissioned to enforce the rules and regulations of the park, but cannot intervene in police/fire emergencies, and are not on duty 24 hours/day.

Call to report trespass issues, vagrant camps, rule violations, trail or irrigation issues, encroachments, wildlife issues, damaged facilities, downed trees, weed management concerns, etc. Carson Nature Center 303-730-1022 Share your wildlife sightings, get answers to your nature questions, inquire about park management issues, sign up to volunteer, and find out about upcoming programs.

Program Registration 303-347-5999 or [ssprd.org/nature](http://ssprd.org/nature)  
Colorado Parks and Wildlife 303-291-7227 (wildlife issues)



### South Platte Park

3000 W. Carson Dr.

Littleton, CO 80120

(north of Mineral, west of Santa Fe)

Carson Nature Center

Open Tu-F from 12-4:30 pm

Weekends 9:30 am-4:30 pm

303-730-1022

[ssprd.org/nature](http://ssprd.org/nature)

[facebook.com/southplattepark](https://facebook.com/southplattepark)