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Explore Cherry Creek Valley Eco Park right in your own backyard

Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park offers residents an exciting nature preserve worth exploring any time of year.

The educational nature park, located at 7500 S. Jasper Ct., south of Arapahoe Road and east of Jordan Road, was jointly developed by Arapahoe County, which owns the Park, and the Parker Jordan Metropolitan District.

Recently, Arapahoe County added several features to the Park to enhance visitors' experience and to protect its natural habitat from the surrounding urban environment.

New projects recently completed include a Council Gathering Ring with landscape boulder seating for 15 to 20 people, an Outdoor Stepped Nature Classroom with stone seating for up to 25 people, new entry monuments near the parking lot and the Park's pedestrian bridge, 57 new evergreen and deciduous trees, and split rail fencing on the Park's western boundary.

The Park also features a boardwalk across the wetlands, a floating dock on the pond, educational signage providing a self-guided tour of the area, overlooks and benches along the creek and pond, and picnic tables and restrooms.

Children's Activity Book

The Parker Jordan Metropolitan District has published *The Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park Activity Book* designed especially to appeal to elementary school children. It offers exercises, experiments, puzzles and creative illustrations to help children enjoy the Park. The book also covers the Park's historical habitation by Native Americans and settlers and its current role as an environmentally sensitive educational preserve along Cherry Creek. It explains seasonal changes, wildlife, plant types and water cycles.

The book is available free of charge by contacting R. S. Wells LLC, district manager, at 303-779-4525. The book also is available at www.valerianllc.com. To download the book from the web site, click on: Enter, Projects, Environment, Click to Download Activity Book.

For information and rules on the Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park, visit the Arapahoe County web site at www.co.arapahoe.co.us. Copies of a brochure on the Park are available on the web site or by calling 720-874-6723. Updates on periodic nature activities at the Park will be available in 2008 at www.co.arapahoe.co.us and www.cherry-creek.org.

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Seasonal Highlights for Self-Guided Tours of the Park

- January** Watch for raptors and signs of their adaptation to the Park environment. Following a fresh snowfall, you may see tracks made by mice, birds, rabbit, fox and even coyote.
- February** Be aware that many bird species begin nesting or 'family planning.' (In fact, February 14 is the traditional 'date night' for Wood Ducks!)
- March 21** ***The Spring Equinox.**** This is a great time to discover the treasures of the Park. Look for buds opening on trees, birds beginning to build their nests or reuse old nests and meadowlarks and small animals preparing to have babies. You may see squirrels begin their nesting activities, as well as hawks. Watch for signs of native cool season grasses beginning to sprout.
- May/June** Look for songbirds and other small creatures, but be careful not to disturb young families.
- June 21** ***The Summer Solstice.**** Now the days are the longest of the year with more daylight hours to enjoy the Park.
- July/August** Look for and identify animal tracks and birds; plums, chokecherries, native grasses and wildflowers. Learn about the Cottonwood Tree, the resident giant and largest living organism in the Park's ecosystem.
- Sept. 21** ***The Fall Equinox.**** This date marks the time when daylight hours equal nighttime hours. Watch for signs of how plants begin to adapt to winter by entering into their energy-conservation mode, dropping leaves and diverting energy into maintaining their roots. Songbirds and turkey buzzards begin to leave the Park and it's the season for the beautiful harvest moon.
- Dec. 21** ***The Winter Equinox.**** Now the days are the shortest of the year and the nights are the longest. Fresh snow may help you identify animal tracks of various species.

****Study Your Shadow.*** To better understand how the solar system functions, take advantage of each Equinox and the Summer Solstice to observe and measure the changes in your shadow at various times of the year.

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