



# WELCOME TO COOPER CREEK PARK



**YOU ARE AT THE EDGE** of a riparian woodland ecosystem—a woodland bordering a waterway. Trees and other plants along the banks form a reciprocal relationship with organisms in the creek: each benefits the other. Healthy riparian ecosystems provide rich habitat for diverse plants and animals. The benefits to people include: scenic beauty, erosion control, water filtration, air purification, cooler temperatures, and carbon sequestration. Cooper Creek is a tiny tributary which flows into Rock Creek, then Brush Creek, the Blue River, the Missouri River, the Mississippi River, and finally into the Gulf of Mexico.



## MONARCH WAYSTATION

Throughout the park, you will find beds of native plants selected to benefit native pollinators, including the endangered Monarch butterfly. Keystone plants such as milkweed, goldenrod, and asters serve as host plants for many species of caterpillars. They also provide nectar and pollen to butterflies, moths, bees, and other pollinators such as hummingbirds. These creatures, in turn, sustain birds, reptiles, and other animals further up the food chain. Cooper Creek Park, by virtue of its native plantings, is an official Monarch Waystation.



## NATIVE ANIMALS

Every animal, simply by following its natural instincts, plays a vital role in keeping an ecosystem in balance. Some help grow new plants by pollinating flowers or spreading nuts and other seeds. The plants then make the food, oxygen, and shelter that animals need to survive. Carnivores eat herbivores, keeping their populations in check so they don't eat all the plants. Finally, animals die, and with the help of flies, beetles, and larger scavengers, decompose into the soil where their nutrients are ultimately taken up by plants—and the cycle continues.



## NATIVE TREES AND PLANTS

Native trees and plants are naturally adapted to the climate and soil of the region, so they're able to thrive without supplemental fertilizer or watering. Their deep root systems help reduce erosion and stormwater runoff. The number and diversity of native trees and plants in Cooper Creek Park provide increased *resilience*: the ability to withstand threats from extreme weather, insect infestation, disease, pollution, and invasive species. Native trees and plants provide essential habitats for a wide range of animals.



## THREATS: INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES

In a healthy ecosystem, native plants and animals form complex, interdependent relationships. When non-native species invade the ecosystem, they disrupt these vital connections, threatening the entire ecosystem. This happened at Cooper Creek when bush honeysuckle and wintercreeper spread thickly along the banks, crowding out the native plants. To restore the habitat, these invasive plants, along with Callery Pear and Tree of Heaven, were removed and replaced with hundreds of native trees, shrubs, grasses and wildflowers.

