

## STAUNTON STATE PARK ECOSYSTEMS

The uplands within the park support montane forests dominated by ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and lodgepole pine interspersed with montane grasslands. Subalpine forests of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir are found at higher elevations in the northern part of the park. Aspens groves occur over a range of elevations typically where there is adequate moisture and sunlight. The creeks support riparian forests and wet meadows in the valley bottoms. The boundaries between ecosystems are not distinct and many of the plant and wildlife species intermingle. For instance Engelmann spruce favors higher elevations but can extend down to lower elevations along stream bottoms where cold air flows down the valley and collects.

### MONTANE FOREST



**Best locations:** Throughout the park at low-mid elevations (8,000 to 10,000 feet)

**Characteristics:** Upland coniferous mountain forests with a diversity of species, stand structure and density

**Plants:** Ponderosa Pine, Douglas Fir, Quaking Aspen, Lodgepole Pine, Limber Pine

**Animals:** Abert's Squirrel, Porcupine, Stellar's Jay, Golden-Mantled Ground Squirrel, Pine Squirrel, Bobcat, Mountain Chickadee, Pygmy Nuthatch, Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Woodland Raptors – Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-Shinned Hawk, Northern Goshawk

#### Significance:

- Extensive diversity of vegetation types and intermixing of conifer species which contributes to wildlife habitat diversity.
- Ponderosa Pine stands with old-growth characteristics (widely spaced, large diameter, grass-shrub understories) larger than a few acres are rare along the Front Range– habitat for dependent species like Flammulated Owl & Abert's Squirrel

- Aspen stands are limited along the Front Range and are important habitat for elk, deer and resident and migratory breeding birds
- Large cliffs/rock outcrops provide habitat for rare Boykinia (*Telesonix jamesii*) and various raptors - one of few Front Range Peregrine Falcon nest sites

### MONTANE GRASSLANDS



**Best locations:** Above Elk Falls Pond, NW corner of park, east of lower Mason Creek Trail, fringes of wet meadows

**Characteristics:** Dry open meadows and open forest understory dominated by grasses and forbs on relatively level terrain or lower slopes

**Plants:** Native species and introduced pasture grasses - Fescue, Timothy, Oatgrass, Bluegrass, Smooth Brome Grass, Prairie Sagewort, Yarrow, Current/Gooseberry, Common Juniper

**Animals:** Pocket Gophers, Mule Deer, Elk, Yellow-Belly Marmots, Mountain Bluebirds, raptors that forage over grasslands - Red-Tailed Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Golden Eagle, American Kestrel

#### Significance:

- Interspersed with various forest communities, they create a varied landscape essential for wildlife
- High diversity of grasses and forbs
- Provide wildfire fuel breaks

### RIPARIAN / WETLANDS



**Best locations:** Areas around creeks, ponds and seeps, Riparian forests along Black Mountain Creek and Mason Creek, wetland above Elk Falls, and wet meadows on North Elk Creek, North Fork North Elk Creek and Elk Creek

**Characteristics:** Water at least seasonally at or near the ground surface, wet soils, preponderance of plants adapted to wet conditions

**Plants:** Blue Spruce, Engelmann Spruce, Alder, River Birch, Willows, Sedges, Rushes, Reedgrass

**Animals:** Amphibians, Trout, American Dipper, most wildlife

#### Significance:

- About 75% of the wildlife species in Colorado are dependent on riparian areas during all or a portion of their life.
- Important wildlife travel corridors
- Habitat for rare budding monkeyflower
- Two rare plant communities:
  - North Elk Creek fen wetland** is fed by slope springs not groundwater and takes thousands of years to develop and is extremely rare along the Front Range
  - Black Mountain Creek rare blue spruce/river birch riparian vegetation community** is found only in deep moist canyons of the Colorado Front Range.

### SUBALPINE



**Best locations:** Higher elevations (above 9,500) – Upper Black Mountain Creek

**Characteristics:** Higher elevations where precipitation is predominantly snow and summers are cool, wind thrown and stunted/twisted trees in high wind areas

**Plants:** Engelmann Spruce, Subalpine Fir, Limber Pine

**Animals:** American Marten, Long-Tailed Weasel, Snowshoe Hare, Elk, Gray Jay, Pine Grosbeak

#### Significance:

- Black Mountain Creek headwaters support budding monkeyflower habitat
- Provides contiguous habitat with Pike NF for wildlife like Elk and forest carnivores like Lynx and American Marten

