

Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Department
Public Dog Park Policy Meeting
March 13, 2007, 6:00 pm, Isaac Newton Center

The following are comments and questions from members of the public in attendance:

The number one concern some members of the audience had was their desire for larger areas that will allow dogs to run, play, and be trained in an off-leash environment. Deputy Director Joe Schultz informed those people in the meeting that the Coyote Lake / Harvey Bear Ranch County Park Master Plan, approved by the Board of Supervisors on January 27, 2004, proposes a large off-leash dog park (5+ acres) to be located in the West Flat section of the park. The development of the off-leash area will be completed within an estimated 3-10 year period, depending on available funding.

Another major concern from the public was maintenance of the dog parks and dog-accessible trails. There is a need for more pooper-scooper bags and receptacles to dispose of dog droppings. Frequency of re-filling the bag dispensers and emptying the trash cans is a maintenance and operations obligation.

A third major concern from some attending the meeting was for the education of dog owners, informing them of laws regarding licensing, spay/neutering, vaccinating, etc. Perhaps developing an educational brochure and posting signs using pictures, as well as words, for those who do not read English.

There were many suggestions made at the meeting. They include:

- Designate some days and times when dogs can be allowed in individual parks without a leash. Joe Schultz, Deputy Director, responded that dogs must be on-leash at all County parks except in the off-leash dog parks or if they have a special permit to train dogs.
- Create a "Volunteer Patrol" to assist in enforcing the rules; this includes cleaning of the areas where dogs frequent. (Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District and East Bay Regional Parks have volunteer patrols)
- Develop a "Special Permit" to reserve time to use a park for dog training and allowing dogs and humans in the water. Some enclosed areas would work for this special purpose or possibly using existing dog park areas and reserve special times for dog training in the confined area. Joe explained that special permits are given for rescue training and other dog training within the County.
- Anyone not picking up after his or her dog would receive a fine. To insure public safety, protection of the environment, and the integrity of the new policy that allows expanded dog access on leash; the Department will actively enforce ordinance provisions related to pets in parks. Visitors, who fail to leash their dog, pick up after their pet, or who fail to follow the off-leash area rules may be subject to citation. All attendees applaud this action.

- Some dog events such as San Jose City's "Bark in the Park" could be offered to encourage more responsible behavior from dog owners. Expanded outdoor recreation activities with dogs are welcomed.
- Display a sign that says "Pick up after your dog, it's the right thing to do, and it's also the law".
- One visitor stated that a special tag could be issued to dogs that pass obedience training.
- The San Jose Retriever Club is working with Senior Park Ranger Mike Bacon so they may utilize parkland for their training. They are helping maintain and improve the area. They are looking for additional land to conduct organized training.

Deputy Director Joe Schultz provided paper and pencil for anyone who preferred to submit their questions and/or comments in writing. The following was received at the end of the meeting:

Q. Campbell: Can the dog parks be open at night and have the lights on?

A. Not at this time. Parks close at dusk.

Q. Campbell: Can the \$5.00 parking fee be discontinued?

A. Park admission is a significant revenue source to the Department and it does defray maintenance and operation costs.

Q. Campbell: Can it be posted and/or available by phone (early am) if the dog park is open?

A. Yes, we are working on the procedure to "post" the open / closed signage that is convenient to the user.

Q. Can we have more off-leash areas in the neighborhoods?

A) The County is currently in negotiations with the City of San Jose for a possible off-leash dog facility at Penitencia Creek Park. As currently proposed, the City would be responsible to plan, develop and operate the facility similar to the Milpitas Dog Park in Ed Levin County Park.

Q. Can the new dog park on Camden Avenue be opened sooner than June/July?

A. The County does not have a planned dog park on Camden Avenue. Perhaps this is within the City of San Jose.

Q. I see many people letting their dogs off-leash in the parks and schools so I see the need for it in the neighborhoods.

A. Dogs are not allowed off-leash in County parks except in designated enclosed dog parks or persons who have a permit to do so. The Department will actively enforce ordinance provisions related to pets in parks. Visitors, who fail to leash their dog, pick up after their pet, or who fail to follow the off-leash area rules may be subject to citation.

Q. Access to off-leash dog parks need to be close to vehicle access, as equipment may need to be carried.

A. Noted.

This information will be shared with the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Commission at their meeting on April 4, 2007 at 6:30pm.

The following people were present at the meeting:

Mike Reyes
Ursula Cabalzar
Karen Price
Leslie A. Meisner
Lisa Lee
Eugenia Woodard
Joseph Kral
Dimity Mueller
Robert Herrera
Terry Southard
Jan Hintermeister
Christy Gonzales
Nicolas Kelpé
Lisa Kelpé
John s. Pearson
J. Epstein
Ron May
Lori Littlehead
Greg West

Expanded Dog Access In Santa Clara County Parks Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why is the Santa Clara County Park and Recreation Department expanding dog access?

Answer: In the Department's Strategic Plan, (a document that presents a road map to guide the acquisition, planning, development, programming, management, and funding of regional parks and recreation) the Department was tasked to evaluate the system-wide policy for dog access in County Parks. Also, within the same document, increasing Outdoor Recreation activities and facilities for visitors with dogs was an action item.

Q. Where are dogs currently allowed and where is dog use being expanded?

Answer: The Department web site www.parkhere.org lists all the parks where dogs are currently allowed on- leash and at the off-leash dog parks. It is staff recommendation that dog access be expanded to all trails and parks, where feasible, on a six (6) foot leash. One exception to this general rule is Calero County Park, where dogs are currently restricted. However, dogs on leash will be evaluated in the upcoming master plan for possible inclusion into the park.

Q. What criteria were used where dogs are not allowed?

Answer: After considering public safety, resource management, use conflicts, lease restrictions, and compliance with applicable local, state and federal regulations it is recommended that dogs be excluded from: Children's playgrounds, historic or archeological sites, interpretative centers and sites, the motorcycle park, rifle and pistol range, trap and skeet range (except by special permit for gun dogs), the Velodrome at Hellyer Park, sensitive habitat, and concentrated youth activities.

Q. Where are County Park's off-leash dog parks located and what are plans for future off-leash dog parks?

Answer: The County has three (3) off-leash dog parks located on county land: Hellyer County Park, Los Gatos Creek Dog Park, and at Ed Levin Park maintained and operated by the City of Milpitas.

The Department is in negotiations with the City of San Jose for a possible off-leash dog facility at Penitencia Creek Park. As currently proposed, the City would be responsible to plan, develop and operate the facility similar to the Milpitas Dog Park in Ed Levin County Park.

In addition, the Coyote Lake / Harvey Bear Ranch County Park Master Plan approved by the Board of Supervisors on January 27, 2004 proposes a large off-leash dog park to be located in the West Flat section of the park. The development of the off-leash area is included as part of Phase II implementation. Elements included in Phase II, including the off-leash dog area, will be completed within an estimated 3-10 year period, depending on available funding.

Q. Do I need to pick up after my dog in parks and on trails?

Answer: Yes, it is a violation of county ordinance to not pick-up after your pet. The Department will make additional effort to provide pooper-scoopers in high use areas. The Department is currently evaluating existing sites, and will be installing new dispensers in park areas and trailheads that are known to be heavily used by visitors with dogs.

Q. Will the Department enforce violations?

Answer: To insure public safety, protection of the environment, and the integrity of the new policy that allows expanded dog access on leash; the Department will actively enforce ordinance provisions related to pets in parks. Visitors who fail to leash their dog, pick up after their pet, or who fail to follow the off-leash area rules may be subject to citation.

Q. Will this expanded dog use policy be updated in the future?

Answer: The revised Dog Access Policy calls for periodic review of dog access in County Parks. As lands are acquired, or safety, resource management, use conflicts, applicable laws or regulations change; the Department shall review and modify the Dog Access policy and update signage as needed. Any modification, including the current updated policy, will be reviewed and approved by the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Commission prior to implementation.