



Responsible dog owners for off-leash recreation

March 31, 2005

The Sacramento Dog Owners Group appreciates this opportunity to participate in the update of the American River Parkway Plan, as we have ideas we believe will greatly enhance the Parkway for ourselves and all the other people who use it.

We believe that future uses of the Parkway should include plentiful opportunities for people to enjoy it while walking, exercising and playing with their dogs off their leashes at appropriate times and places.

First, and most importantly, the presence of responsible dog owners is good for the parkway. Responsible dog owners care deeply for the areas they enjoy with their dogs, and actively seek out ways to be responsible stewards. In the past, responsible dog owners have moved aggressively to care for the Parkway, clean it of litter, both dog and non-dog related, and have served to deter illegal homeless camping. Time after time, we see these problems increase when off-leash recreation is discouraged or eliminated. We should learn from this experience. Sacramento dog owners are an organized user group that can work with the County Parks Department and others to provide stewardship and help improve their parkway areas.

Secondly, experience here and elsewhere proves that off-leash recreation is absolutely compatible with other uses. Consider the East Bay Regional Park District, Marin County, Marymoor Park in Washington, and Boulder's Open Space and Mountain Parks, all of which have successful leash-optional open spaces within their parks. For example, EBRPD's Point Isabel welcomes 1 million dogs a year to its 21 acres of San Francisco Bay shoreline. These dogs and their owners enjoy the area along with solo hikers, fishermen, and birdwatchers. Dog owners respect restrictions on use at low tide aimed at respecting the needs of birds. It is a resounding success. Another dramatic success story is Marymoor, which claims off-leash dog owners and bird watchers as its two largest user groups!

We can offer many other examples where the inclusion of off-leash recreation in open space has enhanced the scenic value and public enjoyment of those areas. Unfortunately, we have no such opportunities here in Sacramento. In contrast, the American River Parkway's sweeping, universal ban on off-leash recreation eliminates these benefits and unfairly discriminates against responsible, caring users. We hope this Parkway Plan Update will correct this unwise mistake.

Policies patterned on those which have worked elsewhere should be enacted for the Parkway. Restrict off-leash dogs in those areas, if any, where they may most greatly affect natural habitat. Allow them in the most appropriate areas of the parkway. Include necessary signage and the active participation of a responsible user group. Proper planning and a willingness to work with dog owners can protect sensitive

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areas and encourage positive interactions with other users.

We dog-owning users of the American River Parkway want to enjoy appropriate areas of the Parkway with our dogs off-leash, just as park users now do in the other aforementioned areas. The responsible dog owners who are members and supporters of SacDOG (Sacramento Dog Owners Group) enjoy, love and respect the Parkway as much as all the other user groups you're hearing from. We want to protect it. We want to be, and can and should be, part of the solution to the issues facing the Parkway.

We'll be happy to provide any additional information you desire. Thanks very much for considering our views.

Sincerely,
Sacramento Dog Owners Group

See the following Web sites some planning strategies:

East Bay Regional Park District
<http://www.ebparks.org/dropdown/dogs.htm>

The City of Boulder
<http://www.ci.boulder.co.us/openspace/visitor/dogs.htm>

Public Open Space and Dogs
<http://www.petnet.com.au/openspace/frontis.html>

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