

METRO VANCOUVER REGIONAL PARKS BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICE FOR DOGS

1. Introduction

The number of park visitors and the numbers of visitors bringing dogs to Metro Vancouver Regional Parks is increasing. “*Metro Vancouver Regional Parks Best Management Practice for Dogs*” documents current best management practice to guide and assist Metro Vancouver Regional Parks (MVRP) staff in decision-making around providing opportunities for recreating with dogs in regional parks.

This document is one of many envisioned best management practice documents which derive from various policy frameworks, as described in the Planning Model in the PRMD Body of Knowledge. As with all the best management practices, the need and challenge exists to balance and trade off with other frameworks to achieve the best long-term park management result. More specifically in this case, the applicable goals and strategies in the Natural Resources Management Framework need to be balanced with the visitor service objective of providing options and opportunities to recreate with dogs.

To facilitate the formulation of dog best management practice and decision-making on dog use in Metro Vancouver Regional Parks, the following planning and management principles and criteria on which to base the evaluation of options apply.

2. Guiding Principles

- 2.1. Recreating with a dog is an appropriate and legitimate visitor activity in a park therefore MVRP provides options and opportunities to recreate with dogs:
 - While protecting natural resources and park visitor experience; and
 - In response to public demand; and
 - Complementary to region-wide supply including those provided by other agencies.
- 2.2. Dogs are welcome on-leash in MVRP sites, except those areas and facilities designated as dogs-excluded. Some areas and facilities are designated as leash-optional.
- 2.3. Visitors should expect a reasonable level of safety on their visits for themselves and their dog.
- 2.4. Commercial dog services should not conflict with park visitor experience or environmental protection.
- 2.5. Decisions for the provision of park areas and facilities designated for leash-optional, on-leash or dog exclusion will be made in a fair and equitable public participation context.

3. Planning & Design Criteria

3.1. For Dog Activities in General

- 3.1.1. The need for facilities to support dog-related activities in Parks is met in the context of the entire park system. Priority is given to the preservation of important park values and particularly in maintaining the balance between public use and environmental protection. In the absence of necessary information on which to base decisions the precautionary principle is applied.
- 3.1.2. Access by users to any park is guided by the Park Management Plan for that park. All dog-related facilities and use patterns should be guided by the park management plan. Where there is no management plan, operational policy and best management practices guide decisions.
- 3.1.3. The on-leash, leash-optional or dog excluded designation is guided by the ability of the environment to support that use. Plant associations, faunal communities and natural values are considered when planning access for dogs to regional park areas. For example, dog use may be limited or excluded where a red or blue-listed species, or a threatened or endangered plant association, is present.
- 3.1.4. The on-leash, leash-optional or dog excluded designation should be guided by the analysis of the impact on park experience by other park users.
- 3.1.5. The Park system will provide opportunities for park users and park wildlife to experience a dog-free environment.
- 3.1.6. All major decisions on establishing or altering the pattern of use of parks by dogs and their owners will, where feasible, be done through public consultation to ensure that decisions are balanced and reflect the needs of stakeholders.

3.2. For Provision of Designated Dog Leash-Optional Areas and Facilities

- 3.2.1. Provision of dog leash-optional areas should be balanced and complementary throughout the region with regional parks serving a destination role and municipal parks serving a neighbourhood function.
- 3.2.2. Environmentally sensitive areas, including stream corridors, water bodies, important wildlife habitat areas, fragile vegetation areas (including ornamental plantings) should be avoided or provided with effective barriers to create separation of use.
- 3.2.3. No leash-optional opportunities will be created in close proximity to populations of threatened or endangered species or important habitats if there is any chance that the dogs may contribute in any way to an increased threat to those species or habitats.

- 3.2.4. Adequate monitoring of environmental impacts of leash-optional dog use must be undertaken, with adjustments to protect areas as needed.
- 3.2.5. Dog-accessible areas and facilities (either on-leash or leash-optional) may be provided based on time (of day, week, month, and/or season).
- 3.2.6. Mixed-use leash-optional trails should be avoided.
- 3.2.7. Leash-optional areas should either be located away, or segregated by appropriate barriers or fencing, from playing fields, playgrounds, swimming beaches, and other active recreational uses of the park (especially those involving children).
- 3.2.8. Leash-optional areas should be easily accessible by vehicle and should be provided with off-street parking facilities of adequate size. The open area of the leash-optional site should be visible from the vehicles parked in the lot. Parking should be handled from main visitor hubs, if possible, to minimize exposure to theft and vandalism in isolated sites.
- 3.2.9. Leash-optional areas fronting on busy traffic streets should be avoided or fenced for the safety of dogs and their owners.
- 3.2.10. Leash-optional areas and facilities should be large enough to avoid overcrowding and its related impacts on park resources.

3.3. For Provision of Dog Use Amenities

- 3.3.1. Basic amenities for dog use include: dog waste bags, garbage cans, dog waste removal and disposal, signs, staff patrol. Additional basic amenities for leash-optional facilities may include: fencing, planting.
- 3.3.2. Leash-optional areas and facilities should provide amenities enjoyed by dogs which might include: open field/grass areas, varied topography, surfaced looped trails, adequate drainage for winter use, shade and drinking water.
- 3.3.3. Where appropriate, opportunities for contact between dogs and water for swimming and fetching should be provided.
- 3.3.4. Leash-optional areas should provide a minimum level of aesthetic and functional amenities for dog owners which might include: shade, rain shelter and/or a gathering area with benches, tables, bulletin board. The areas should be designed to encourage socialization among dog owners.
- 3.3.5. Leash-optional areas follow current best design practices and standards (e.g. are fenced or natural buffer, large/small dog separation, double entry/exit gates).

- 3.3.6. Specialized amenities or enhanced services for dogs (e.g. dog washing, retail merchandizing, purpose-built dog playground structures) could be provided if the demand warrants them and through the Enhanced Services policy.

3.4. Regulatory Compliance Management

3.4.1. Dog Education & Communication

- 3.4.1.1. Dog-related messages, education and communication and related bylaws will be consistent with this document.
- 3.4.1.2. Key messages include:
- Promote health & wellness & parks benefits
 - Promote visitor understanding of rules, compliance & pet etiquette:
 - obey signage for leashed, leash-optional, excluded
 - under control
 - leash & collar
 - scoop poop
 - more than 3 requires permit
 - leash up when meet horse
 - stay on trails
 - Seasonal needs of wildlife, habitat areas
- 3.4.1.3. Dog management signage conforms to an approved design standard.
- 3.4.1.4. "Under control" definition is used as a basis in planning and implementing education programs.

3.4.2. Bylaws Enforcement

- 3.4.2.1. Dog management practice is supported by Parks Regulation and Fees and Charges bylaws.
- 3.4.2.2. Compliance with Regional Parks dog regulations is enforced on a priority and resource-available basis.

3.4.3. Commercial Dog Activities Management

- 3.4.3.1. Management of commercial activities involving dogs is supported by Parks Regulation and Fees and Charges bylaws.

- 3.4.3.2. Permits for commercial dog walking by time slots and/or specific locations or routes may be considered to minimize conflicts with other park users and other commercial walkers. Commercial dog walkers are best spread through appropriate areas.
- 3.4.3.3. Evaluating the advantages of using the tender process to price the allocation of walking permits to qualified bidders may be considered.
- 3.4.3.4. The total number of dogs walked at one time by any walker in Regional Parks without a permit is three dogs.
- 3.4.3.5. Anyone in Regional Parks with 4-8 dogs is required to have a valid permit, and is considered as a commercial walker, until proven otherwise.
- 3.4.3.6. Commercial walkers in Regional Parks will have visible identification and a copy of the valid permit issued for commercial dog walking operations.
- 3.4.3.7. Commercial walkers in Regional Parks will be required to muzzle and leash any dog that acts in an aggressive manner.
- 3.4.3.8. Commercial walkers in Regional Parks will be required to leash dogs that are unable to respond so as to be 'under control', even in leash optional areas.
- 3.4.3.9. Commercial dog walkers in Regional Parks will be required to hold a valid insurance policy in liability coverage and naming the municipality in which the permit has been issued as an "additional insured".
- 3.4.3.10. A fee for commercial dog walking will be levied.