



WASHOE COUNTY

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STAFF REPORT

PARK COMMISSION MEETING DATE: January 6, 2015

DATE: December 31, 2014
TO: Open Space and Regional Park Commission
FROM: Colleen Wallace Barnum, District Park Manager
THROUGH: Jennifer Budge, Park Operations Superintendent
SUBJECT: Update and discussion on proposed off-leash pet area at Hidden Valley Regional Park and possible recommendation to staff on the management of certain area(s) within Hidden Valley Regional Park.

SUMMARY

This item is for review, update, and discussion of citizens' request for a designated off-leash pet area within Hidden Valley Regional Park.

BACKGROUND

Currently, Washoe County has two designated off leash areas within the park system, the Link Piazza Dog Park at Hidden Valley Regional Park and the off leash area (pasture) at Rancho San Rafael Regional Park. According to Washoe County Code Chapter 95, dogs must remain on a leash at all times within a County park, unless otherwise designated by the Director.

During a meeting of the Hidden Valley Homeowner's Association in April of 2014, a large contingent of citizens expressed a desire to designate an off leash pet area within Hidden Valley Regional Park. In response to this request, a public meeting was advertised and held on August 28, 2014 at Hidden Valley Regional Park to allow for public input and comment on the proposal. 27 people attended the public input meeting.

In addition to the meeting, a public survey was created to capture responses from the general community that could not attend the public meeting. The survey was open until September 15 and there were 72 respondents (survey results attached).

A park staff working group consisting of Park District Managers and Park Rangers reviewed the survey results and the four proposed areas recommended by citizens at the public meeting for potential off leash use. (see attached maps). The four areas considered comprised of the following:

1. Inner Loop
2. East of Fence (Perimeter Loop into hills)
3. North and East
4. All Undeveloped Areas of the Park



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In considering all options, natural resource damage, citizen health and safety, and potential repercussions on all other regional parks with open space areas are significant concerns. Since natural resource damage may increase with off leash activity, some fenced off control areas similar to range management studies (where there would be no access by dogs and their owners) to determine impacts may need to be considered.

Inner Loop (Map #1)

- It will be difficult to confine dogs within the loop trail because there is no fencing around the loop.
- It is flat and has ease of access for parking and entering from the north.
- If there was fencing, it could work well.
- With current infrastructure and no budget for a fence, it would be the most difficult to manage.
- Fencing cost is estimated at more than \$60,000 for this particular option.

East of Fence (Perimeter Loop into hills) (Map #2)

- It could have an effect on the wildlife in the park, particularly the wild horse population. The current fence installed in 1997 was to assist in managing the wild horse population impacts to the park.
- There is no eastern boundary line – we may want to provide signage regarding private property to the east.
- It will protect the developed areas better.
- There is less flat terrain access for the users that desired it.
- This area would provide no conflict with vehicles.
- It will be easier to manage based on the visual fence and 5 access gates.
- Could prove difficult to manage dog walkers getting from their vehicles to the off-leash area east of the fence. This is an issue at Rancho San Rafael already where people do not leash their dogs on the way to or from the off-leash area.

North and East (Map #3)

- It could have an effect on the wildlife in the park, particularly the wild horse population.
- It would be extremely difficult to manage an on-leash requirement in the developed areas because most of the developed areas are surrounded by undeveloped.
- It could be very unsafe for dogs and motorists as the main roads cross undeveloped areas of the park.
- It would provide some flat terrain that some of the users desired.
- It would provide ease of access from the adjoining neighborhoods (Sleepy Hollow and Parkway).

All Undeveloped Areas (Map #4)

- It could have an effect on the wildlife in the park. Birds, coyotes, rabbits, and wild horses just to name a few.



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- It would be extremely difficult to manage any on-leash requirements in the developed areas because most of the developed areas are surrounded by undeveloped.
- It could be very unsafe for dogs and motorists as the main roads cross undeveloped areas of the park.

Park staff also collected information on the management of dog parks and off-leash dog areas throughout the nation. Staff was able to make contact with 12 different agencies, all of whom have off-leash dog areas and/or dog parks.

There are varying practices throughout the nation. Some of the findings and key points for discussion included:

- Voice & Sight control tag program (Boulder, CO)
- Off-leash advisory council (Portland, OR)
- Citizen groups managing all off-leash areas with volunteers (Seattle, WA and San Diego, CA)
- Master Plan in Salt Lake City (2007) included Best Practices research – of the 10 communities researched, more than 50% of the respondents stated that regulation and policy enforcement was very problematic.
- Park Rangers with citation authority are necessary to effectively manage leash laws and customer driven complaints – Ossining, New York (all agencies that had Park Rangers managing leash requirements had citation authority)



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City/State - Agency	Management Plan	Management Responsibility	Comments
Oakland, CA	yes	Park Rangers	more public asking for leashed areas
East Bay Regional Parks			
Farmington, New Mexico	no	Park Rangers	issues with wildlife, particularly birds
Farmington Parks, Recreation & Cultural Affairs			
Ft. Worth, TX		Citizen group	
City of Fort Worth Parks and Community Services			
Rockford, Illinois	no		forest preserves with off-leash user conflicts
Forest Preserves of Winnebago County			
Charlotte, North Carolina	yes		loose boundaries are difficult to manage
Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation			
Ossining, New York			Park Rangers need citation authority
Alberta, CANADA	in process	Animal Control & Park Rangers	user conflicts required a master plan
City of Edmonton Parks & Recreation			
Portland, OR	yes, advisory council	Park Rangers	control, education, and enforcement
City of Portland Parks & Recreation			
Seattle, WA	yes, pilot program	COLA (Citizens for Off Leash Areas)	
Seattle Parks & Recreation			
Denver, CO	yes	Park Rangers	
Denver Parks & Recreation			
Boulder, CO	yes	Park Rangers	Voice & Sight control tag program
City of Boulder - Open Space and Mountain Parks			
Austin, TX		Park Police	Scoop the Poop campaign
Austin Parks & Recreation			
Kansas City, MO	yes		
Kansas City Parks & Recreation			
Salt Lake City, UT	yes		
Salt Lake County Parks & Recreation			
San Diego, CA	no	Citizen group	citizen groups are responsible for all
San Diego Park and Recreation Department			



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While staff recognizes the need for additional off-leash locations throughout the region, a thoughtful approach is imperative to address the potential impacts of this activity (wildlife, natural resources, dog waste not being removed, cost, user conflicts, displaced users, etc.) and is consistent with best management practices.

Staff recommends the creation of an off-leash management plan for Hidden Valley Regional Park. It is anticipated that the Hidden Valley plan should be developed with an understanding that it may be used as a model or "pilot" for a broader off-leash management plan for all Washoe County parks and open spaces. To facilitate this process, a citizen stakeholder group is critical and necessary to developing a thoughtful plan. . The stakeholder group may include interested community members, park staff, an Open Space and Regional Park Commissioner, a representative from Regional Animal Services, and technical experts (professional dog trainers, veterinarians, natural resource experts etc.). The regional plan could possibly be a joint effort in conjunction with the Cities of Reno and Sparks and will be a topic of discussion at the joint Park Commission meeting tentatively scheduled for March 2015. Additional efforts to update Washoe County Code Chapter 95 should also be considered as part of this effort to ensure staff has the appropriate authority to enforce the recommendations of the plan as well.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Open Space and Regional Park Commission recommend Park Staff create a citizen stakeholder group as outlined in the staff report to develop an off-leash management plan for Hidden Valley Regional Park.

POSSIBLE MOTION

Should the Commission agree with the staff recommendation, a possible motion would be:

"Move to recommend Park Staff create a citizen stakeholder group as outlined in the staff report to develop an off-leash management plan for Hidden Valley Regional Park."