



## Dogs on Town Conservation Land FAQs

### Concord Natural Resources Commission

**Question: Public access to conservation lands should be provided. Shouldn't this include dogs?**

**Answer:** The Natural Resources Commission welcomes people and dogs on all Town conservation lands, subject to rules and regulation. Most Town conservation trails, more than 70 percent, allow dogs be off leash, under effective voice control. A few properties require dogs to be leashed. At Punkatasset, White Pond, and food-producing agricultural fields on Town conservation lands, dogs must be leashed at all times. Dogs must be leashed seasonally at Mattison Field (April 1 to July 31) to protect ground-nesting bobolink. The NRC's goal is to balance the conservation land experience for everyone, including dog owners, who enjoy conservation land, as well as the conservation land values for each property.

**Question: How can dogs be a problem?**

**Answer:** Amongst the scientific community and conservation land managers, it is generally accepted that some dogs can affect some species of wildlife. This can happen through the direct effect of a dog chasing and harming or killing wildlife, or indirect effects from flushing a bird from its nest, scaring it from an area that it needs to gather food or protect young, or wildlife avoiding areas that have been scent-marked by dogs (thus reducing available habitat). Last spring, several incidents of dogs being bitten were reported from Estabrook Woods, from mother coyotes defending their young from off leash dogs. A few dogs aren't expected to have an impact, but as our population grows, and there are more dogs using trails, wildlife have fewer places to live safely.

Other trail users may be afraid or allergic to dogs, or just not like having dogs run up and greet them. Some residents have said that they no longer walk in some conservation lands because of fear of being knocked over.

**Question: What's the problem with dog waste?**

**Answer:** There are many health and environmental issues associated with dog waste. Nitrogen from dog waste can cause significant changes to soil composition, killing native plants and encouraging noxious weed growth. Dogs have a wide variety of intestinal bacteria that harbor parasites including roundworm, whipworm, hookworms, tapeworms, parvovirus, giardia, salmonella, and *E. coli*. Roundworm is one of the most common parasites and can remain in soils for years.

Dog waste is also unpleasant, smells bad, and detracts from the positive experience of enjoying conservation lands.

**Question: Why do dogs need to be leashed at Punkatasset?**

**Answer:** The new rule for leashing dogs at Punkatasset was enacted because of Punkatasset's high-value natural habitat, and because Estabrook Woods, of which Punkatasset forms a part, was intended to be protected as a Nature Preserve. The Estabrook Woods is recognized by the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife as a "significant wildlife area due to its habitat diversity and area size". There are several ground nesting birds that are particularly vulnerable to off leash dogs. Last year, two dogs were bitten by coyotes defending their young – had these dogs been leashed, these events would very likely not have occurred.

**Question: Why do dogs need to be leashed on farmland?**

**Answer:** The Food Safety Modernization Act requires that farmers ensure their produce is free from pathogens associated with animal waste, including dog waste. On Town food-producing conservation lands that are leased to farmers, the NRC has implemented a leash requirement to help farmers comply with this regulation. The Agriculture Committee recommends that this restriction be year round instead of seasonal because, depending on the crop, fresh animal waste may not come into contact with crops within 90 or 120 days of harvest. Requiring leashes also helps to ensure that dogs won't trample young seedlings, as has occasionally been reported.

**Question: What other Town Conservation Lands require leashes?**

**Answer:** Existing leash restrictions at White Pond are in place to reduce slope erosion and preserve water quality. At Mattison Field, dogs must be leashed between April 1 and July 31 to protect ground-nesting bobolink. In all, more than 70 percent of Town conservation trails remain open to dogs under effective control. Other Town lands may require that dogs either be leashed or under their keeper's control. Any other dog restrictions you may encounter around Town have been put in place by entities other than the NRC.

**Question: Why is this decision being made now?**

**Answer:** The question of how to manage dogs on conservation land is not new. In 2003, the NRC added a rule that dogs needed to be under control of their owner, and that dog waste needed to be removed from Town conservation land. The 2004 Open Space and Recreation Plan noted concerns with the effects of dogs on conservation land stating: "trails should be consistent with conservation objectives", that the concentration of people using the trails, "especially when accompanied by dogs, can be expected to have detrimental effects on natural populations of key wildlife", and that "...some trail closures or dog limitations may be appropriate in ... large natural areas, such as the

Estabrook Woods area, to protect natural populations of wildlife". These concerns were also reiterated 2015 Open Space and Recreation Plan.

How to manage dogs on conservation land is being broadly discussed at the local, regional, and state levels. In January 2018, the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife announced new regulations requiring dogs be leashed at Wildlife Management Areas across the state.

The number of people and dogs on conservation land is increasing, and land managers at the local, regional, and state levels need to find ways to ensure that conservation lands remain high biodiversity areas and enjoyable for the public for current and future generations. One or two or ten dogs likely has little effect, but the cumulative impact of thousands of dogs continuously using conservation land each year adds up. The precautionary principle notes that "When an activity raises threats of harm to the environment or human health, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically".

**Question: How will the rules be enforced?**

**Answer:** The Animal Control Officer, Rangers, and other Natural Resources staff will educate the public on the new rules, and will enforce compliance.

**Question: Will the Hunt continue to be allowed?**

**Answer:** Not at Punkatasset. The Old North Bridge Hunt Club has been in existence for nearly 50 years, and rode through Punkatasset and other parts of Estabrook Woods for a biannual 'hunt'. This use will not be permitted to continue in future at Punkatasset.

**Question: What complaints has the NRC heard from other users?**

**Answer:** Some walkers or children are afraid of dogs, and many don't enjoy dogs running, barking, sniffing, or jumping on them or their dogs, even if the dogs are friendly. Some unleashed dogs have bitten people or other dogs. A rider was thrown from her horse when an out of control dog spooked the horse. Last spring, incidents were reported where dogs were attacked by coyote mother's protecting pups. Several users have stated that they no longer walk in some conservation lands because of uncontrolled dogs with no owner in sight.