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April/May 2020

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An ongoing conversation

A spirited Facebook discussion arose recently about the future of DOGPAW and its off-leash parks, the role and openness of the organization's board, and problems in the parks' parking lots.

The lively back-and-forth is, once again, a tribute to DOGPAW's engaged and dedicated membership. We'd just like to clarify a few points that came up in the course of that debate:

--DOGPAW doesn't own the parks, their water taps, public toilets, parking lots, or other facilities. The land and improvements belong to Clark County (in the case of Dakota, Kane, and Lucky) or the Bonneville Power Administration (in the case of Ike/Ross). In addition to letting us use the land to exercise our dogs, the county has generously agreed to mow and maintain the three parks in its jurisdiction, but DOGPAW remains responsible for mowing and other maintenance at Ike.

--Community-wide shutdowns and government-issued "stay-at-home" orders prompted by the global coronavirus outbreak have seriously disrupted routine

maintenance schedules, law enforcement patrols, and other support services at all the parks. The parks remain open, although the social distancing, face-mask recommendations, and other virus-related measures all apply there--as they do everywhere else. Tasks such as repainting the stripes in the parking lots are on the county's to-do list, but it probably goes without saying that they're a pretty low priority.

--Car break-ins and vandalism, along with disregard for handicapped parking slots, should be reported to the Clark County Sheriff's Office (for incidents at Dakota, Kane, and Lucky parks) or to the Vancouver Police Department (for incidents at Ike/Ross). DOGPAW is in no position, financially or operationally, to provide security at any of these locations. We do ask that you notify us of such problems by dropping us a line at ask@dogpawoffleashpark.org. And we'd also note that our off-leash parks are not alone in facing these problems; car prowls and vandalism occur too often even in residential driveways.

--The DOGPAW board strives at all times to maintain open lines of communication with its members, through the organization's website, Facebook page, and e-mailed newsletters. We also held three well-attended public meetings last year, and were planning our first 2020 gathering for mid-April. That meeting, slated to be held at the city's Firstenberg Community Center, has been postponed indefinitely--again, as a direct result of the virus crisis.

--We support and applaud members and park users who develop their own informal groups, such as the small-dog play group at Dakota. These parks were created for people and their dogs to enjoy, and anything that enhances that experience for our visitors is fine by us.

These are troubled times for our community and the world at large. We're proud to offer parks that allow people a place to go, to exercise, socialize, and breathe some fresh air, all with their dogs and other, often two-legged, friends. We ask that you all be patient with any park shortcomings you find during this global pandemic, and contact us at ask@dogpawoffleashparks.org with your concerns or questions.

Dogs and the social distance

As regular visitors to our off-leash parks have probably noticed by now, dogs are pretty cavalier about observing the social-distance rule.

It's almost as if they're unaware of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic and the spread of COVID-19. These carefree four-legged friends just barge right into other dogs' personal space, and often extend the same familiarity to humans other than their own.

What's more, those people frequently react on an ancient instinct, honoring the millennia-long human-canine partnership by reaching down to pat the amiable arrivals.

However, we've heard from some park users who have reasonable concerns about the possible transmission of the coronavirus from skin to fur--and then onto someone else's skin.

There's no clear science on this question, and in all likelihood it's still safe to return a canine's innate companionability. But in this fraught time of disease and distancing, it would be a shame if it turns out that petting a dog can also spread infection.

So, for the time being at least, let's approach petting someone else's dog the same as we do before offering a treat to another person's furry friend: Look around for the owner, and seek permission before bending down. Chances are, overwhelmingly, that that person will smile and grant it, but it's just good manners these days to ask.

And for those who, understandably, remain worried about their pooch's disease-vector potential, we'd recommend leashed walks around their home neighborhood. Free ranging, after all, is part of the off-leash park experience--and an exuberant dog, loose in an environment full of smells, squirrels, and friendly dogs and their dog-loving humans, is pretty hard to monitor.

DOGPAW OFF-LEASH DOG PARK LOCATIONS:

Dakota: 1515 N.E. 164th Ave. Vancouver, WA

Ike (Ross): 5167 N.E. 15th Ave. Vancouver, WA

Kane: 10910 N.E. 172nd Ave. Vancouver, WA

Lucky: 10100 N.E. 149th St. Brush Prairie, WA

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