



Throw Us a Bone!

Why our dogs should be allowed to run free

I belong to my neighborhood association, volunteer in my community, drive the speed limit, pick up litter, and let my dogs run free in the American River Parkway.

Yes, I knowingly break the law. Even though there aren't any signs in the parkway that tell people that dogs need to be on a leash, I know it's against the law. There are signs in the parkway that prohibit alcohol, campfires and

overnight camping. There are also signs that read: "Take out what you bring in." I am curious as to why people and law enforcement are relatively ambivalent to the blatant disregard of those regulations, yet they become irate at the mere discussion of allowing dogs off leash in the parkway.

Two years ago, I read the American River Parkway Plan (written in 1985) and found that there is no mention of a leash law. The document lists "dog field trials" as a prohibited activity in the parkway, but nothing about leashing your dog. No wonder many people have been walking their dogs off leash in the parkway for decades without knowing they were breaking the law.

An update of the American River

Parkway Plan will begin this fall. A precursor to this long-overdue update was a comprehensive study of the Lower American River. As a result of the study, the American River Parkway was designated as a "National Recreational Trail." According to the study's report, the American River Parkway Plan needs to be updated because "Since 1985, new uses and reorientation of existing uses need to be reviewed and considered." The same document says that the "county must address new recreational activities such as mountain biking and off-leash dog recreation."

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So there you have it. The county needs to examine new recreational activities that have emerged since 1985. Remember the in-line skaters? They were prohibited from skating in

the parkway, but they appeared before the Board of Supervisors and got the board to include in-line skating as an allowable recreational activity in the parkway. It literally took an "act of the board" to allow in-line skating.

We expect to help the county by educating people on the rules of the pilot program, raising money to pay for signs, continuing to place bags along the trails and cleaning up after our dogs as well as any litter we find.

Off-leash activity is a popular and harmless recreational activity enjoyed by people and their dogs all over the country. The distinction between fenced dog parks and off-leash recreation in open space must be made. Fenced dog parks are not for everyone, nor are they for every dog. People who like to exercise with their dogs cannot do so in fenced dog parks. Additionally, large dogs cannot get the exercise they need in a fenced park. But most importantly, playing with a dog off leash in open space is the recreation of choice for many constituents in the county. Other jurisdictions that offer people unfenced off-leash areas in open space include East Bay Regional Parks District in Alameda and Contra Costa counties, the Marin Open Space District, Marymoore Park in Seattle, the Mid-Peninsula Open Space District, the city of Huntington

Beach, and Ambleside Park in West Vancouver, British Columbia, to name just a few. I've had conversations with several of the parks directors and discovered there are few to no problems with having dogs run unencumbered.

Our organizations, SACDOG and ARDOG, are not asking for any changes to city law. We are not asking to run our dogs off leash in city parks or on the levee that separates the parkway from the back yards in River Park. We are asking for a two-mile portion of the flood plain in the American River Parkway between the H Street Bridge and upstream from the Capitol Freeway. Nor are we asking for dogs to be allowed off leash all the time.

On August 6, we will ask the County Board of Supervisors to approve a 24-month "pilot off-leash program" in a small portion of the American River Parkway, which would allow us to recreate with our dogs off leash a few hours in the morning and a few hours in the evening. The rest of the day, dogs would be required to be on leash. We expect to help the county by educating people on the rules of the pilot program, raising money to pay for signs, continuing to place bags along the trails and cleaning up after our dogs as well as any litter we find.

We would like this program to begin in September in conjunction with the American River Parkway Plan Update.

Kim Kuenlen is a member of the Sacramento Dog Owners Group and American River Dog Owners Group, whose mission is to reduce restrictive leash ordinances in open space areas, including the American River Parkway. She lives in River Park with her two miniature Australian shepherds. For more information about the off-leash proposal, visit sacdog.org. ♦