

ATTACHMENT M: EDITORIAL FROM *SACRAMENTO BEE*

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Unleashing a controversy

Supervisors revisit dog policy along river

Sometimes government must govern to the lowest common denominator. In this case that's the meanest of the dogs (and the most thoughtless of the owners) that frequent the American River Parkway.

In August, Sacramento County supervisors are expected to revisit their policy of requiring leashes on all dogs at all hours on all 4,000 acres of the parkway. As anyone who spends time along the parkway knows, this is one of the most frequently broken laws (violating owners risk a \$70 ticket) in the Sacramento region.

A responsible group of dog owners is asking for some type of pilot program to allow their pets to run free at certain places during certain hours (probably in the early mornings and late afternoons/early evenings). Depending on what they and county staff and supervisors ultimately come up with, there may be something worth trying. The last time supervisors tried a pilot project along the parkway for something controversial - to allow skaters access to the paved trail - it turned out that the skaters and the bicyclists managed (by and large) to coexist.

However, there's no way that a skater, a bicyclist and an unleashed Fido can coexist on the paved trail. No pilot test should allow dogs to get anywhere near the bicyclists or skaters, who have enough to look out for as it is.

The question is whether there's room elsewhere in the 4,000-acre parkway for the dogs to run free, such as those undeveloped stretches along the river itself. This is where many dog owners go to unleash their pets, and where others go for some peace and quiet. The responsible owner will keep his dog leashed around others as a matter of courtesy. The problem will remain the irresponsible owners.

What's more, these undeveloped areas of the parkway have the least amount of law enforcement, since rangers typically patrol in vehicles on the paved trail. If the hiker runs into a problem with a vicious dog or the loose, precisely what's that hiker to do?

That's why unleashed dogs are now banned. If there's to be any loosening of this ban, it will work only if the dog owners vigorously police themselves. The priority has to go to letting visitors on two feet, not four paws, enjoy the parkway.