

DOG-GONE-IT!

More than ever, parts of our Natural Area are becoming “dog parks” for city folks to enjoy a walk in the woods while also giving the family pet an outing. Informal recreational use surveys have confirmed that a large percentage of visitors bring their dogs. Dog walkers tend to use the Natural Area more often and to use it year around. For many years we have had posted leash rules for dog walkers, but even then many dogs are turned loose once on the trail by owners that tire of restraining fido who is bursting with excessive energy and enthusiasm.

New studies by Colorado State Univ. have detailed the effects of dogs (75 million in U.S.) on the ecology and wildlife communities. It was found that the impact was greater than one might expect. The cumulative effects of dogs on wildlife activity was measured scientifically in recreational areas quite similar to the Dishman Hills outside Boulder, CO. They found 25% of visitors were accompanied by dogs (higher in DH) and logged in 2 million dog visits annually. They compared several areas including sites with leash rules, no-dogs areas, and sites with off-leash rules. Care was taken to subtract the effects of human recreation. Using pellet plots, track plates, remote-triggered cameras, and scat surveys, effects were documented.

The study had some interesting results. The average domestic dog is not an efficient hunter but is an avid chaser. Most of their food requirements are meant at home, allowing ample energy to interact with wildlife. Occasionally, dogs will kill, but the main detrimental effects are scents, noises, chasings, and flushings as they traverse trails. These effects were found to be heaviest within 15 feet of trails but were detectable up to 300 feet. Small mammal activity was observed to proportional decrease as dog activity increased, and that wildlife predators avoided areas of dog scent, making trails a linear strip of “dog territory”. Many small mammals such as rabbits tended to avoid dog roaming areas due to the increased need for vigilance and other fear-based activities. Some species converted to nocturnal habits to avoid the dog activity that is normally limited to daylight hiker hours. It was determined that wildlife avoided most of all trailhead areas where dogs defecate frequently, leaving scent markers.

How does all this effect the management of our natural spaces? We may have to treat leashed dog activity as a moderate-impact activity rather than a low impact activity. This is especially true since with dogs allowed, a fairly large percentage of the dog walkers seem to be unable to refrain from letting the dogs loose. We should probably declare a dog-free sector of the Natural Area to protect the wildlife that would be most impacted, and to improve the wildlife viewing opportunities for trail users. At minimum, we should enforce the leash rules, so if you encounter loose dogs, please kindly remind the owner of the leash rule, and why it is very important to do what we can to conserve the Dishman Hills.

EVENTS

Make note! The annual Buttercup hike has been rescheduled for April 18th. That is a Sunday afternoon, more details next month. Camp Caro will not be open till April 15th, so we thought it was best to move the hike from the previously announced date. We are also help scheduling a REI sponsored cleanup/planting day on April 24th. There will be lots to do for all on that date.

BIG ROCK ON MOVE

The Dishman Hill board has decided to offer the Big Rock property up for transfer to Spokane County Parks and Recreation. We obtained the property last summer after a long campaign, and we feel that this move is the best strategy to assure that Big Rock remains a community asset for conservation, recreation, and education for future generations. Additionally, The Big Rock parcel represents a very important component of the larger Spokane County Conservation Area to the north, and for management reasons it should be joined with this larger acreage. Spokane County has agreed with this transfer and in the next few months we will be working with them on the details.

We will still be dealing with the parking issues at the end of Stevens Creek Road this spring. Since there is still no parking areas at the north end of the road, we are still asking those who want to use the area not to park there until we develop places for parking.

ASSOCIATION NEWS

We are a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have questions. Our board meets every month on the third Tuesday. Our next meeting will be March 16th. We will meet at the Moran Prairie Spokane County Library, 6004 South Regal St. Members are always welcome to attend to see what is going on or to talk to the board.

The following are our January donors that have consented to be listed: Nancy Cashon, Dave Cole, Joe Collins, Linda Crowe, Robert Downing, Brent & Vicki Egesdal, Paul Flanary, John Frankhauser, Don Griffiths, Gary & Andrea Gunning, Michael & Claudia Hamilton, Jonathan Isacoff, Pat Killien, Jeff Lambert, Cynthia Langlois, Dave Lill, Betty Maron, Kerry Masters, Sharon Murphy, Bob & Kelly Ordner, Marion Phillips, Shirley Schmidt, Nan Smith, John & Barbara Swan, Kenneth Swedberg, Robert & Darlene Turner, Robert & Sylvia Wilson, Peter & Jennifer Wolbach, Art Zack, and two anonymous donors. Great support to start out a new year of activity; special thanks to you Boosters out there!

I believe in God, only I spell it Nature—Frank Lloyd Wright

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