

Dogs welcome at most parks if owners obey rules

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Plastic bags are available beneath a sign asking owners to clean up after pets at Tuscarora State Park

When naturalist Robin Tracey leads hikes through two state parks where she works, she invites hikers to bring their dogs.

"People love to bring their animals to the park. They love to walk them. I thought 'Let's put it out there and make it public,'" Tracey, an environmental educator at Tuscarora and Locust Lake state parks, said.

Dogs are welcome at state parks, state forests, the Greater Hazleton rail trail and, of course, the Hazleton Dog Park set to open May 7. In the parks and on the trails, owners have to follow rules. For example, they must keep dogs on a leash and pick up after their dogs.

Failure to follow the rules creates risky situations for dogs and people and messy trails.

Breaking the rules also can be expensive.

A Freeland man ticketed for letting two dogs run loose at Nescopeck State Park on March 20 faces fines and costs totaling \$438.

Rules for state parks say dogs must be on a leash and kept under physical control so they won't intimidate people or damage property.

Dogs aren't allowed in swimming areas such as beaches, inside park buildings or at most campsites.

Some campgrounds designate sites for dogs, which cannot roam through the rest of the campground.

In 2012, the state will experiment by letting dogs stay in designated cabins.

Dogs don't have to be on a leash in state forests, but they must be attended and controlled at all times, the rules say. One exception is the Pine Creek Rail Trail, on which dogs must be leashed.

The Hazleton rail trail permits dogs, too, on leashes.

"One of the most important issues we have with dogs is some owners not cleaning up after their pets," Michael Bloom, a VISTA employee who helps with the trail, said in an e-mail. "We have a few people who don't, and it causes the volunteers more work to clean up after them."

Bloom suggests that owners carry plastic bags to pick up waste, which can be dropped in garbage cans at the trailhead.

Letting dogs stray off the trail can expose them to ticks and other critters, he said. Bears roam the rail trail.

Dr. Inayatullah H. Kathio, a veterinarian in Pittston, recommends vaccinating dogs against Lyme disease, which is transmitted by a tick. Flea collars are effective, but topical ointments rubbed on the skin are better defenses against flea infestations and tapeworms.

Kathio also said dogs can cut their feet on sharp objects strewn along trails.

While dogs are prohibited from some public areas, such as Hazle Township Community Park, a group in Hazleton is developing a park just for dogs.

The Hazleton Dog Park will be inside a converted football field at the Louis Schiavo City View Park on South Poplar Street near Route 424.

Hazleton Mayor Joseph Yannuzzi said the fenced-in field will be divided into areas for large dogs and for small dogs. Owners can buy an electric card that will admit them to the park for \$5 a month or \$55 a year.

Drinking fountains are planned for dogs and people.

Students from the Hazleton Area Career Center will build an obstacle course for dogs, while students from the Keystone Job Corps Center will install wiring and plumbing and concrete pads for shelters. Bus shelters no longer needed downtown will be set up at the park.

A gravel path along the perimeter of the field will deter dogs from digging beneath the fence.

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