

Who Let the Dogs In?



Since 1973, a City of Madison ordinance essentially prohibits dogs in Madison parks, school grounds, and City spaces. As the population of Madison continues to grow, presumably so does the number of dogs and dog owners. In early 2019, the Board of Park Commissioners called for a review of this long-standing ordinance (MGO 8.19).

During the summer and fall of 2019, Parks Long Range Planning Subcommittee (LRP) reviewed the dogs in parks policies. Through its research, and a robust community input process, which included 5 citywide community workshops and an online survey—garnering more than 1,900 responses, Parks LRP drafted an on-leash dog access policy for the Madison parks system. The policy provides greater access for dog owners while balancing the needs of other park users and provides the language to update the long-standing ordinance.

In October 2019, the Board of Park Commissioners approved the [Guidelines for On-Leash Dog Access to the Madison Parks System](#) policy, which led the way to update the long-standing Madison General Ordinances (8.19 and 23.32) that essentially prohibited dogs in most Madison parks. Updated ordinances were first introduced to the Madison Common Council on February 4, 2020.

“We recognize this long-standing ordinance is essentially dog-negative and effectively unenforceable. The update provides a much more balanced perspective, where we are open to permitting dogs on-leash across the park system, and setting clear expectations of where dogs are prohibited,” said Parks Superintendent Eric Knepp.

[Dog Free Parks](#) provide a place to recreate or relax without the presence of dogs. At the time of

this writing, more than 30 locations, approved by the Board of Park Commissioners, can and may change as we implement and enforce the ordinance. In addition to the Dog Free Parks, a number of locations, such as all conservation parks, will continue to prohibit dogs.

It is important for dog owners to know the ordinance does not allow dogs to be off-leash or to run free at any time. The only place dogs are allowed off leash are in the [designated fenced exercise areas](#)—soon to be expanding to 9 locations. And as always, owners must pick up after their dog. Violators are subject to a citation and may be reported by contacting a Park Ranger (608) 235-0448.

Learn more: [Dogs in Parks](#)



Volunteers Survey Plants in Conservation Parks

By Jan Axelson, Friends of Cherokee Marsh President

Last spring, Conservation Resources Supervisor Paul Quinlan put out a call for volunteers to survey plants in conservation parks. Mary Binkley, Tamara Hill, and I volunteered to survey at Cherokee Marsh.

TRACKING SUCCESS

Parks staff selected locations in areas where they have focused restoration efforts in recent years. Our team surveyed in three prairies, two woodlands, and a savanna.

A goal of the surveys, Quinlan says, is to “help us use our resources more efficiently, track and demonstrate the success of restoration projects, and monitor the long-term health of these natural areas.” Repeating the surveys yearly will show changes over time.

Parks staff held a training session where we learned how to perform the surveys and gained some practice. Each survey follows a transect, or line, several hundred feet long and identified by blue-tipped marker posts. Every 50 feet along the transect, we set down a 1-meter-square open frame. We then attempted to identify every plant species growing within the frame. We also noted any other species we happened to see growing nearby.

A TEAM EFFORT

At times we found identifying the plants to be challenging, especially small seedlings and plants not yet in flower. I found

it helpful to be working in a team, as each of us had different knowledge and experience.

Even so, for a few species, especially grasses and sedges, the best we could say is “unknown grass” or “unknown sedge.” Some of the asters and goldenrods also required detailed study for a confident ID. We puzzled for a while over a plant that turned out to be a common but easily overlooked species with the odd name of 3-seeded mercury.

To help in identifying, we used the books *Wildflowers of Wisconsin and the Great Lakes Region* and the *Peterson Field Guide to Wildflowers*.

The number of species we found on each transect ranged from 36 to an astounding 85. We noted that areas with aggressive plants such as reed canary grass and raspberries had much less diversity.

Favorite sightings were two lily-leaved twayblade orchids, some patches of American figwort (a nectar-rich plant favored by bees and other pollinators), and several ferns. I’m looking forward to seeing what we find when we repeat the surveys this summer.



Volunteer surveyors tally the plants found within a 1-meter frame.

SURVEYORS NEEDED

Volunteers also surveyed in Owen and Edna Taylor Conservation Parks, and staff hopes to add surveys in Turville and Prairie Ridge. “The surveys in 2019 were very successful thanks to the many dedicated volunteers who really followed through and helped get our monitoring program off the ground,” Quinlan reports. If you have good basic plant ID skills and are interested in helping with this project, contact [Paul Quinlan](#), (608) 267-4918.

Jan Axelson is a volunteer with the Friends of Cherokee Marsh. A version of this article appeared in the newsletter of the [Friends of Cherokee Marsh](#).

Friends of Hoyt Park Maintain, Improve Community Gathering Place while Creating Lasting Friendships

By Haley Bills, UW-Madison Journalism Student

The Friends of Hoyt Park, a non-profit corporation dedicated to enhancing, protecting, maintaining and enjoying the park, was founded in 1995 in response to community concern about its deteriorating history and landscape.

Currently, the Friends focus on restoring natural areas, maintaining hiking trails and planning community activities to bring people to the park, according to the Friends' chair, Tim Astfalk: if it weren't for their work, the park would be a much less hospitable place for Madisonians.

The City of Madison Parks Division aims to provide an ideal park system for all, the City of Madison Parks Division Assistant Superintendent of Operations, Services and Facilities, Lisa Laschinger, said. However, given that the division oversees 260 parks, commitment to these parks from individuals of surrounding neighborhoods is essential for the Division to carry out its mission.

"We very much value the work that Friends Groups do, especially the Friends of Hoyt Group," Laschinger said. "They're able to provide a higher level of service in the park than what we're able to do within the resources that we have."

The collaboration between the Friends' and the Parks Division is generally very friendly, according to Astfalk. For instance, they hire a summer ranger each year who works on different projects within the park for three months. While the Friends' fund and direct the ranger's work, the Parks Division is responsible for hiring them as a city employee.

Further, the Parks Division gives a certain amount of ownership to the Friends' group: when a troop of Eagle Scouts asked the Parks Division permission to put bat houses in the park, the division made sure they got support from the Friends of Hoyt Park before approving the project: this relationship between the organizations illustrates a deeply valued partnership, Laschinger said.

But perhaps the best reward from community involvement are the relationships that develop within the volunteer groups.

"I think just highlighting the Friends as a place for people to meet and get to know each other while enjoying the park, it's really been a good thing for that," Astfalk said. "Our volunteer group gets to be very close, and we get volunteers coming from different organizations ... but there's that core that are always there to help hold the glue together."

Twelve historic fireplaces within Hoyt Park are still put to use today: at the Friends of Hoyt Park's annual sledding party, community members join together to build a fire and enjoy hot chocolate.

There is always something new to see in Hoyt Park. Unique sculptures, avante garde art and snowmen made by community members are always showing up, exemplifying that "it really is a *neighborhood* park," according Astfalk.

The Friends' work doesn't stop for the winter. Clearing invasive honeysuckle and buckthorn and organizing an annual Full Moon Owl Walk are amongst some of the season's highlights.



Coming Soon to a Park Near You!

Parks Planning and Development are working on a number of park improvements and projects in 2020. Active major projects and most recent completed projects are listed on the [Parks Projects](#) website. Projects are listed alphabetically with a link to the individual project page providing additional details and images when available. A sample of the projects you'll currently find.

- Door Creek Park Shelter – City Engineering and Parks are working jointly on the new shelter project.
- East Side Dog Park – Look for public input opportunities regarding options for a potential eastside off-leash dog exercise area
- Warner Park Lagoon Fishing Pier and Ice Access – as identified in the Warner Lagoon Water Quality Plan, an accessible pier will be installed near the Warner Park shelter

Visit [Parks Projects](#) for the latest.

Here's a Sample of Spring 2020 Events

Visit the [website](#) for more events and updates.



Spring Flower Show | Olbrich Botanical Gardens | March 7 – 22



presented by Madison Parks

Sunday, May 17, 2020 | 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Brittingham Park • Olin Park • Law Park

RideTheDrive.com

APRIL

DOG PARK CLEANUP DAY

Saturday, April 4, 10:00am to 12:00pm
Various off-leash dog parks

EARTH DAY CHALLENGE

Saturday, April 25, 10:00am to 12:00pm
Various parks

BIRD & NATURE FESTIVAL

Sunday, April 26, 1:00 to 4:00pm
Warner Park

MAY

PLANT SALE WITH THE PROS

Friday, May 8 and Saturday, May 9
Olbrich Botanical Gardens

CONSERVATION PARK TOUR

Wednesday, May 13, 5:35 to 7:00pm
Heritage Sanctuary

RIDE THE DRIVE

Sunday, May 17, 10:00am to 2:00pm
Brittingham Park | Olin Park | Law Park