

DRAFT report of the Wildlife Subcommittee of the Juneau Dog Task Force

Note that the subcommittee has not had a chance to review this document, it reflects notes and impressions of the subcommittee chair, Karla Hart.

The Wildlife Subcommittee was **tasked with:**

- 1) reviewing literature relating to wildlife and dogs;
- 2) identifying sensitive areas (and seasons if relevant) in the Juneau area;
- 3) developing proposed guidelines;
- 4) identifying what further information might be needed to make an informed decision or recommendation;
- 5) drafting recommendations for the full committee to consider; and
- 6) drafting measures of success for review in fall 2004.

The committee adopted the following **problem statement:**

The pressure on wildlife continues to grow as Juneau's population increases and there is increased recreational activity on trails and open spaces. Of specific concern to the wildlife subcommittee are:

- 1) wildlife and habitat disturbances associated with dogs;
- 2) interference with wildlife viewing and photography activities by dogs; and
- 3) access improvements (new or enhanced) that could bring more dogs into critical wildlife habitats.

Participants have mentioned other human-caused sources of disturbance to wildlife and wildlife viewers. Because this effort is focused on dogs, we have not incorporated those concerns into this effort. We do acknowledge that there are many sources of actual and potential disturbance. At this time, especially along Juneau trails and open spaces, dogs are more prolific than jet skis, bikes, etc. People also impact wildlife and efforts should be ongoing to share ways for all of us to minimize our impacts, but again, this is not the focus of this process.

Impacts of dogs on wildlife (an annotated bibliography is in the works, the best single summary of literature up through the late 1990s is "Domestic Dogs in Wildlife Habitats," Chapter 8 of *Effects of Recreation on Rocky Mountain Wildlife: A Review for Montana*, September 1999, available at www.montanatws.org)

Displacement by presence

Occasional brief passive displacements of any source (people, dogs, natural predators) may have little or no effect. Repeated or lengthy displacements and displacements plus other disturbances may have cumulative effects. Disturbances during critical times of the nesting cycle may eventually cause birds to nest elsewhere or not to nest at all. Some studies have shown that disturbances may cause desertion or abandonment of nests, especially during early incubation.

Although we may consider dogs domesticated, in general, they are perceived as predators by wildlife. This means that the mere presence or scent of dogs, even those on leash or until close control, may result in displacement, hiding or fleeing by wildlife, especially some mammals, to a greater extent than the presence of humans without dogs.

Chasing and harassment

Domestic pets are generally well fed and healthy animals with plenty of energy reserves. Their playful pursuit or chasing of wildlife may apparently do no harm, as they rarely or never catch them. For the wildlife being pursued, this is not a game. They are fleeing from a predator, for their lives.

This results in burning of energy. During times of food shortages, this may make a critical difference to an already stressed animal. For migrating birds, feeding stops are crucial for replenishing fat reserves. Wildlife feeding young already have challenges of foraging or hunting for several.

Fleeing mammals, the literature addresses ungulates (e.g. deer, elk, moose), may suffer physical injuries while being chased, with injuries more frequent in mountainous terrain. Parents and young may be separated, leaving the young vulnerable to natural predation for an unnatural cause.

Dens of burrowing animals such as marmots and ground squirrels may be damaged by digging.

Direct predation and killing

Studies of dogs pursuing deer have shown that dogs may chase deer for many miles and extended periods of time. Because dogs have lost predatory skills
CO news blurb re kills

Ground nesting birds, brooding birds, and small mammals are especially vulnerable to direct predation and killing.

Disease spread between dogs and wildlife

Dogs can introduce and spread diseases and parasites into wildlife habitats, as well as become infected from wildlife.

Sensitive Areas in Juneau –

The wildlife subcommittee evaluated all of the Juneau area public lands, regardless of land management authority, to identify sensitive wildlife areas. A trail by trail inventory demonstrated that essentially all Juneau trails have wildlife species that may be adversely impacted by dogs. The following critical areas were selected for special consideration because of unique and area-limited habitat characteristics.

Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge – including all public access points (e.g. Airport Dike Trail, Fish Creek, and Mendenhall Peninsula). Critical wildlife habitat throughout the year, including one of few remaining documented amphibian breeding ponds on Juneau road system, over-wintering waterfowl, migratory bird stopover (shorebirds April-May and July-August, waterfowl May-June and August – October). The refuge is a critical stopover point with unique characteristics for many shorebirds.

Eagle Beach State Park – especially the tide flats to the north of Eagle River (accessed from what was the Forest Service picnic area at Eagle Beach). These flats provide year-round feeding grounds for shorebirds and gulls.

Tern nesting areas in the vicinity of the Mendenhall Lake – we did not spend much time addressing these because the Forest Service has management authority and has ongoing efforts underway to protect. The Dog Task Force could reinforce through additional education.

Important wildlife areas to protect for habitat and viewing

AMALGA HARBOR TO EAGLE BEACH area

Because it does not have an intense history of dog presence and has important wildlife values, the subcommittee identified the city lands between the Amalga Harbor Road and the confluence of the Eagle and Herbert Rivers for special consideration as trails are developed. The confluence area of Eagle and Herbert Rivers, and specifically the former “Tonsgard” property recently acquired by the City, is important for mustelids (especially sensitive to even the presence of dogs). Coastal forest edge habitat used by river otters has become fragmented and developed along much of the Juneau road system. Much of area from the mouth of the Amalga Salt Chuck to the Boy Scout Camp property has these characteristics. Amalga (Saga) Meadows are feeding grounds for bears, small mammals, and other wildlife.

Mount Roberts from the top of the tram upwards has become a good wildlife viewing area as people are kept on trails so behavior is more predictable, use by people with dogs has declined, and wildlife has become habituated to non-threatening human presence.

The subcommittee agreed that it would be desirable to have dog-free viewing areas representing a variety of habitats including alpine (Mount Roberts), beach, riparian stream, and wetlands.

Recommendations

Keeping dogs on trails limits the area that they influence and provides predictability in their routes. Leashes provide the most control, keep dogs in the immediate proximity of their humans, and are unambiguous for enforcement purposes. Solid voice control with immediate response regardless of stimulus present would serve similar purposes; however, there may be ambiguity and interpretation relating to compliance.

The Mendenhall State Game Refuge and Eagle Beach State Park beach should be closed to dogs year round to protect wildlife (except, as consistent with other wildlife refuges established in part for waterfowl hunting, trained hunting dogs may be allowed while accompanying lawful hunters and being trained for hunting). Note: both of these areas are under state jurisdiction. The CBJ does own upland access points adjacent to the Refuge (e.g. Dike Trail, Fish Creek).

The former “Tonsgard” property should be closed to dogs. (CBJ authority)

The new CBJ trail from the SAGA lodge to Eagle River should be restricted to dogs on leash. And, SAGA lodge should be prohibited from having free-ranging dogs at the lodge, either as caretaker dogs or visiting dogs. (CBJ authority)

The top of Mount Roberts should be closed to dogs for wildlife viewing purposes (again, this is under state jurisdiction). Consideration should be given to other areas in Juneau to represent a variety of habitats.

All **new or reconstructed trail routings** should take into consideration separation of people and dogs from critical wildlife habitats and, to the extent possible, make access to the critical areas difficult.

Education about the impacts of dogs on wildlife and good dog owner behavior should be ongoing and may include: ADF&G “Turning Down the Stress” posters at trailheads, public service announcements, and good dog owner citizenship efforts.

Active and in the field **enforcement** is a critical component to ensure compliance with laws and regulations, and must go beyond the trailheads. (CBJ authority)

New law needed - A monetary fine relating to wildlife harassment by dogs should be enacted. Presently, such activity is illegal under state law, but the penalty is so severe (killing the offending dog) that it is rarely applied. (CBJ could enact with borough, recommend to State)

Dog owners should be better educated on why picking up feces is important for wildlife, dog, and human health, not just for aesthetics. And that doing so is important even if the dog feces is off the trail (which hopefully it would not be if people were all keeping their dogs on the trails).

MEASURES of SUCCESS

The subcommittee did not get this far. Expect that it would include:

Dog owners (or caretakers)

- Keeping dogs out of sensitive areas and those designated or targeted for viewing, regardless of whether a law or regulation is enacted.

- Keeping dogs on trails and under leash or solid voice control.
- Cleaning up after their dogs and encouraging others to do the same.
- Continuing efforts of Good Dog committees, outreach, training, education, clean-ups and role modeling.

CBJ

- Providing adequate enforcement of existing laws.
- Taking steps to protect wildlife and viewing opportunities as outlined above.
- Continuing to provide trailhead bags and garbage cans to encourage and reinforce cleaning up after dogs.