



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-19-100
Meeting 19-19
July 24, 2019

AGENDA ITEM 10

AGENDA ITEM

Dog Waste Compliance Program

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Approve an incremental adaptive management approach to improve visitor compliance of dog waste regulations at Preserves that are open to dog use, as set out in this staff report.
2. Direct the General Manager to return to the Board in the spring of 2020 to share results of the dog waste compliance program and present any other recommendations to further improve compliance.

SUMMARY

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) regulations require visitors to properly dispose of dog waste at District preserves that are open to dog use. These regulations are noted at trailhead entrances, on regulatory signs, preserve brochures, and the District's website. However, dog waste left on trails and at trailheads continues to be an issue that affects the visitor experience, impacts staff time for cleanup, and poses potential public health and environmental concerns. The General Manager asked staff to develop an incremental adaptive management approach that gradually ramps up education, outreach, and enforcement actions to improve compliance. If these multiple measures are insufficiently effective, the program includes as a measure the installation of dog waste receptacles on a pilot basis. Throughout implementation of the program, staff will monitor and collect data to measure the success against target compliance levels of a 75% reduction in dog waste from baseline measurements. In early 2020, the General Manager will return to the Board with an update on results and present any other options and next steps in the program. The adopted Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-20 Budget includes sufficient funds to cover the cost of the recommendation.

BACKGROUND

Since the District's formation in 1972, visitors have been required to pack out any waste they generate during their visit. In general, the practice has been successful with the exception of dog waste. In 2011, the District began requiring visitors to remove dogs waste instead of just moving it off trails. (Attachment 1, Memo to Board - June 8, 2011). Since this time, the problem has changed, from loose dog waste being left in the Preserves to bagged waste being left along trails, in parking areas, and deposited in restroom vaults. As part of the 2018 Preserve User Survey conducted by the Public Affairs Department, visitors identified reducing dog waste bags along trails as one of the top five ways to improve District preserves and the visitor experience.

Prior public input on this topic demonstrates strong public support for finding a solution to the dog waste problem. The District's general information email received 23 concerns or complaints about dog waste between July 2014 and July 17, 2019. The majority of the complaints were regarding dog waste issues at Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve, followed by Windy Hill, Fremont Older, and Thornewood Open Space Preserves. 70% of the complaints included a recommendation to provide trash cans in the preserves and 30% requested better signage or enforcement of the ordinance to prevent dog waste littering (3 of these visitors also requested trash cans). In addition, visitors have been creative in trying to help the District spread the message to remove dog waste. Handmade signs have been posted at both Pulgas Ridge and Windy Hill Open Space Preserves, humorous notes have been tied to individual dog waste bags, and dog waste bags have been piled next to and on top of signs that communicate the rules for removing dog waste from the Preserve.

Field staff regularly pick up bagged dog waste left on trails, and piled in restrooms and trailheads. Perhaps the most disturbing impact that field staff deals with is when visitors throw bagged dog waste into the vault toilets. These bags clog the pumping units used to remove human waste from the vault toilets, requiring bagged dog waste to be individually picked out of the human waste.

DISCUSSION

During the District's first 2018 internal Leadership Academy, an internal staff project team researched the dog waste compliance issue that exists at District preserves. The Leadership Academy team identified the following options to manage dog waste:

- Status quo
- Awareness campaign
- Dog waste composter
- Dog waste disposal in vault toilet
- Restrict dog access
- Dog waste receptacles

The status quo has not been effective, particularly in high use areas where bagged dog waste is frequently left in the preserve. Dog waste composters are designed for home use and ineffective for the volume of dog waste generated by dogs visiting preserves. The only way disposal in the vault toilet would work would be if visitors placed dog waste in the toilet without a bag since decomposable bags can clog toilet pumping units. In addition, both composters and disposal in vault toilets present environmental and regulatory challenges. Restricting dog access where compliance is low would set a significant policy reversal of use where popular dog access now exists. This leaves two options that can be incorporated into a broader incremental and adaptive management approach to improve dog waste compliance: an awareness campaign and consideration of dog waste receptacles.

Awareness Campaign and Expanded Enforcement

Santa Clara County Parks and the City of Santa Cruz both use humorous signs to remind the public "there is no poop fairy" and that each visitor is responsible for picking up after their pet. Using a similar lighthearted approach in communications may be more effective in gaining public attention and improving compliance. The combination of new signage and an information awareness campaign will allow staff to measure the efficacy of increasing visitor knowledge of

the proper way to dispose of dog waste. Targeted enforcement and communication of the rules and regulations by staff and volunteers may also help raise further awareness of District regulations. This type of contact and communication would help visitors understand why dog waste removal is important for protecting open space values and sensitive natural resources, and providing a quality visitor experience that is protective of public health and safety.

Pilot Dog Waste Receptacle

If awareness and enforcement are insufficient to improve compliance, the Leadership Academy team identified dog waste receptacles as a new site amenity to manage dog waste, noting that “*St. Joseph’s Hill Open Space Preserve provides an excellent example of success with dog waste compliance due to the presence of waste receptacles. The Preserve’s dog friendly trails connect with trails managed by the Town of Los Gatos at one end and Santa Clara County Parks at the other end, where both agencies provide and service waste receptacles. Field staff observations and the lack of public complaints indicate that dog waste compliance is high*”. If all other awareness, outreach, and enforcement efforts are ineffective at reducing baseline levels of dog waste by 75%, the next recommended step would be to install pilot dog waste receptacles at Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve. This pilot would be monitored over the course of one year to determine the level of effectiveness in raising compliance levels. The data would be used to inform whether to continue providing waste receptacles at Pulgas Ridge and potentially provide similar waste receptacles at other Preserves that are open to dog use.

Dog Waste Compliance Program

Given the ongoing low compliance issues related to dog waste at District Preserves, the General Manager directed staff to develop an incremental adaptive management approach that gradually ramps up education, outreach, and enforcement actions to improve compliance. Based on prior research, including information collected on this topic by the District’s internal Leadership Academy team, the following Dog Waste Compliance Program (Program) is recommended.

The General Manager recommends implementing this Program at two locations with the highest dog waste compliance issues: Windy Hill and Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserves. Prior to proceeding with the first step listed below, staff would gather baseline data at both preserves, counting the amount of dog waste near trails, at trailheads, and inside our restrooms to numerically establish baseline levels from which to track and report on the changes and improvements in compliance. Staff would incrementally implement each step listed below and track compliance levels to determine whether to continue ramping up the District’s education, outreach, and enforcement actions.

1. Create an informational posting for preserve signboards, post on social media, and post information on the District web site; replace or supplement existing dog waste signage with new signs. (Attachment 2)
2. Host informational stations at both preserves to contact and educate preserve visitors.
3. Include information on dog waste removal as part of docent-led hikes at Pulgas Ridge and Windy Hill Open Space Preserves. Encourage docents to offer additional “doggy docent hikes” to help further disseminate the information.
4. Conduct focused ranger patrols to educate visitors and enforce dog regulations; also solicit assistance by the Volunteer Trail Patrol to remind visitors of District ordinances.

5. If target compliance levels are not met with prior actions, install pilot dog waste receptacles (Attachment 3) at Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve.
6. Continue weekly counts of dog waste bags left at both preserves to measure compliance and effectiveness of the informational campaign (Windy Hill) versus using dog waste receptacles (Pulgas Ridge).
7. Based on compliance levels, determine the effectiveness of continuing the use of dog waste receptacles at Pulgas Ridge and potentially providing similar receptacles at other Preserves that are open to dog use.
8. Return to the Board in early 2020 with an update on results and any other recommendations.

FISCAL IMPACT

The FY2019-20 adopted budget includes sufficient funds in the Land & Facilities operating budget to cover the cost of signs, printing services, and waste receptacles for this program.

BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

This item was not previously reviewed by a Board Committee.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act because it does not have the potential to result in significant physical changes to the environment within the meaning of California Public Resource Code section 2100 *et seq.*

NEXT STEPS

In early 2020, the General Manager will return to the Board with an update on results and present any other options and next steps in the program.

Attachments

1. 2011 Memo to Board from Operations Manager
2. Proposed informational dog waste sign (two versions)
3. Photo of typical dog waste collection station

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Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

Memorandum

DATE: June 8, 2011
MEMO TO: Board of Directors
THROUGH: Steve Abbors, General Manager
FROM: David Sanguinetti, Operations Manager
SUBJECT: FYI - Dog Waste on District Lands

In early 2010, I was notified by the San Mateo County Director of Environmental Health of their concern about dog waste being left in District Preserves. In November of 2010, after researching the Health Department requests and requirements, I advised District Management and the Board of Directors that the Operations Department would implement a requirement that dog walkers “bag dog waste and take waste with you” at the El Sereno, Fremont Older, Pulgas Ridge, St. Joseph Hill, and Windy Hill preserves.

The dog waste requirement has now been in effect at the four preserves for approximately six months. Although field staff have experienced visitors leaving bagged waste in parking lots (which field staff pickup and remove, similar to any waste left by visitors), the problem as described by the Environmental Health Department has improved significantly. Therefore, I am expanding the program to the five remaining preserves that permit dog use: Coal Creek, Foothills, Long Ridge, the Kennedy-Limekiln Area of Sierra Azul, and Thornwood. In the future, when a new location is opened to dog use, the Operations Department will recommend that the “bag dog waste and take waste with you” regulation be implemented, so that the District maintains control of this issue and does not find itself in a similar position with the Environmental Health Department.

The following measures will be implemented to inform dog owners of the dog waste removal requirement and facilitate enforcement by District rangers:

1. Notify staff, volunteers and the public of this change through the District Web Site, e-mail, District Newsletter, and by updating all dog literature and maps.
2. Post and enforce the District Regulation requiring dog waste removal from District preserves as it can pose a health hazard and is considered a public nuisance as covered under MROSD Regulation 701.5, Removal of Animal Excrement.
3. Continue the practice of not providing waste cans, which has been a District practice for over 39 years. This has served the District well by keeping costs down and educating users of their environment responsibility.

Staff will begin signing and enforcing the “bag dog waste and take waste with you” rule for the remaining dog use preserves over the next couple of weeks.

DOG WALKER REQUIREMENT

**Bag Dog Waste
Take Waste With You
No Trash Service Provided**

THERE IS NO POOP FAIRY



- Pet waste does not biodegrade like horse or wild animal waste, it sticks around a long time.
- It contains harmful bacteria, pollutes groundwater and creeks, and smells disgusting.
- Please help keep the Preserve free of poop by picking up your pet's waste and disposing of it properly.

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93-1, Sec. 701.5

