Dog Exercise Area Development Guide

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Written by Dane County Parks Staff, Lisa Slawter, Student Intern 2001, and Ken Hanson, Student Intern 1998
Purpose

This handbook is designed to provide insights from the experiences of Dane County Parks in establishing Dog Exercise Areas. The information included is not specific rules on “how to do it,” but a guide we hope will make establishing a Dog Exercise Area easier.

Public Involvement

The most important aspect of developing a Dog Exercise Area is to involve the public in the development and implementation process. This may be the only definite rule that should be adhered to! A proactive public can assist the government in accomplishing projects that would otherwise remain unfinished. There are many benefits to having public support:

- A wealth of ideas
- Donations
- Willing volunteers
- Strong sense of public ownership
- Gain support from various government officials

Park users at Prairie Moraine Dog Exercise Area
History

In 1992, Dane County Parks initiated the idea of providing specific areas for people and their pets. The Dane County Parks Commission Advisory Committee on Pets was formed to guide the research and development of special use areas for dog owners. Two Dog Exercise Areas opened in 1995 that were devoted to allowing dogs to run off-leash.

The success of these areas was greater than anticipated. The most popular site receives several thousand users a week! As of 2001, six Dog Exercise Areas have been opened, and an additional area is planned.

Soon after the first Dog Exercise Area opened, a Friends Group was formed to provide support. This group has initiated park clean-up days and fundraisers. They have been instrumental in raising money for fencing and establishing walking trails.

Why Are Dog Exercise Areas Needed?

The driving forces for developing the Dog Exercise Areas in Dane County were:

✓ Lack of sites for owners to exercise dogs
✓ Waste disposal problems in the parks
✓ Complaint letters to officials and newspapers
✓ Frequent dog leash ordinance violations
✓ Park user conflicts

The City of Madison did not allow dogs in parks whether leashed or unleashed, while Dane County allowed only leashed dogs in the parks. With limited enforcement resources, many owners ignored these laws and allowed their dogs to run freely. This created park user conflicts and difficulties for park staff.

Dane County promotes the idea of Dog Exercise Areas rather than “Dog Parks.” Designating an area as a “Dog Park” implies the area is only for dogs. This has negative connotations and political ramifications because it limits the use of the area and may be looked at as undesirable in certain areas. The name, Dog Exercise Area, suggests a place where people bring their pets to exercise for a limited amount of time. Dog Exercise Areas can be anywhere, whereas “Dog Parks” are acceptable only in limited locations.
Evaluation Process

To adequately address the range of needs for Dane County Parks, the Advisory Committee on Pets established a list of park issues and identified stakeholders (see Appendix 1-2). The evaluation process included:

- Public surveys (see Appendix 3)
- Recognizing health and safety concerns
- Determining site criteria
- Material specifications

The public survey provided valuable information concerning the attitudes of the public toward dogs in parks. The results showed that the respondents felt that designating an area for off-leash use (a Dog Exercise Area) was strongly preferred instead of allowing a complete park to be designated off-leash.
Choosing a Site

The size and location are the main factors impacting the success of a Dog Exercise Area. The Advisory Committee on Pets brainstormed a list of criteria for Park selection (see Appendix 4).

Size

Dane County Dog Exercise Areas range in size from 10 to 80 acres. Having too small an area may cause conflicts between dogs, increase the degradation of parkland, and decrease the quality of the experience. Prairie Moraine Dog Exercise Area, the largest site, receives an estimated 3,500 to 4,000 users per week. On a busy day there will be more than 100 people and dogs using the area at any given time.

Location

Many factors are important to consider when determining where to locate a Dog Exercise Area. Easy access, aesthetics of the area, and proximity of other off-leash areas will eventually affect the amount of use an area receives, but there are other factors that need to be considered as well.
Features

The most popular sites will have a variety of features:
- Trees for shade
- Water for swimming
- Flat and hilly topography
- Open areas for throwing balls and socializing.

Not having these features should not limit you however; Dane County Parks has two popular sites that are converted open farm fields.

Available land

Current Uses

When selecting a site, it is important not to displace established park users.

General Population

The population impacts the amount of use the Dog Exercise Area will receive. The more popular sites in Dane County are close to larger populations and receive more use than rural areas.

NIMBY

The Not-In-My-Back-Yard attitude may arise when trying to locate a Dog Exercise Area in a highly populated residential area. Parks in general provide opportunities for the public to relax, enjoy nature, play, socialize, etc. Businesses and developers use parks as an attraction. Even though parks typically draw people and increase the value of neighboring homes, Dog Exercise Areas are an unfamiliar use that may cause static initially with neighbors.
Planning & Development

Amenities

Though drinking water, shelter houses, lights, and restrooms are desired, they are not a necessity. Presently, Dane County Parks does not provide any of these amenities. In fact, Dane County limits these amenities to help control or limit the time people stay. The more amenities provided, the longer users will stay. Our intent is to have turnover, to keep users moving to make room for more users. Amenities may be added at a later date as resources become available to develop, manage, and maintain them.

Erosion

Erosion in Dog Exercise Areas is a problem that must be planned for. Heavy use areas such as entrances, paths, and popular water access points will be impacted. Conducting a soil survey and paying attention to the slope gradient when developing the area may help decrease problems, but plan to provide improved paths and accesses from the start. Main pathways are covered with bark mulch or gravel; less used paths will be mowed turf. Mulch is the preferred material for covering the muddy and erosion prone areas because it is inexpensive, readily available, and reduces compaction of the soils. One drawback is that it must be reapplied periodically. Park entrances are graveled. Along the banks of water access points, fabric and stone has been used to control erosion and stabilize the shorelines.

Dane County has had some problems with Dog Exercise Area users creating their own new trails. These unplanned trails are not very environmentally friendly and have caused damage to natural resources. To address this issue, trails are blocked off and closed, and signs are posted (see Appendix 5). Educating park users about erosion issues, explaining reasons behind park design, and encouraging peer pressure to observe posted signs will help deter problems. The best means to control erosion has been to completely fence off sensitive areas.

Barrier in front of trail indicates it is closed because of erosion
Boundaries

Dane County has developed Dog Exercise Areas using signage, natural barriers, and fencing. **Unless you have good natural barriers, we recommend fencing all Dog Exercise Areas!** Water is the only natural barrier that works as well as fencing. The fencing we use is a four-foot high woven wire fence. The gap in the woven fence should not be greater than six inches; four-inch gap is recommended for small dog areas. The fencing should be installed so it is in constant contact with the ground (below grade is better). This will discourage dogs from crawling under. Additionally, boundary signs are located inside and outside the area to identify the designated Dog Exercise Area. Boundary fencing is a major cost of creating a Dog Exercise Area (see Appendix 6). Volunteer groups may provide great assistance in finding/raising the money for the fencing.

Health & Waste Management

Dog Waste

This is a complex issue that can be a big concern when developing a Dog Exercise Area. Users are required to collect their dogs’ feces utilizing the special collection bags and place waste in receptacles provided at each park. Dane County has a rule that agricultural or animal waste cannot be placed in a landfill. To address this issue we contract with a vendor for the waste to be composted and land-spread on approved sites. The waste removal contractor provides plastic barrels for disposal of the waste and empties the receptacles once or twice a week. We are exploring the use of waste bags that will dissolve in water. Waste would be collected in tanks similar to portable toilets and hauled to a sewage plant.

Currently we use two types of biodegradable bags designed for collecting dog waste:

- Ooops-Scoops, a paper bag
- The Flushable Bag, a plastic bag

However, there are a variety of products to choose from (see Appendix 7). A small number of dog owners are not diligent and conscientious about collecting their dog’s feces, but a faithful group of volunteers organizes clean-up days for this purpose. Users are also encouraged to contact the Parks when they observe rule violations.
Disease Transmission

The opportunity for disease transmission will always be present, but the risk can be decreased. Providing large use areas spreads the concentration of dogs, therefore reducing the chances for disease transmission. High concentrations of dogs are unavoidable at the entrance and where facilities are provided (water access points). **Dane County Parks does not provide drinking water for dogs. Many users bring their own water source, as an alternative to a community drinking area, which can be a source for transmission of diseases.**

Dog owners are required to have a rabies license for any dogs entering a Dog Exercise Area. When Dog owners apply for a Dog Permit to use the County Parks, they must identify the dogs’ license number (issued by the local municipality). This license provides a measure of protection and reassurance to other park users that dogs have been vaccinated (a requirement to obtain a dog license).

Dog Conflicts

Due to the concentration of dogs, dog conflicts do occur. Incidents of injuries reported to Dane County Parks have been minimal. The Dog Exercise Area rules require that dogs be kept on leash until inside the park area and must at all times be under the owners’ voice command. The owners are generally close, so fights are dissipated quickly. Aggressive dogs are required to be leashed at all times. Owners are responsible for their dogs’ actions. Those dogs that continue to demonstrate aggressive behavior are restricted from Dog Exercise Areas by revoking their permits.

Dog Exercise Area users have expressed their concern about the safety of children and small dogs in the Dog Exercise Areas. Dane County does not restrict the presence of either children or small dogs, users are expected to self regulate. A separate area fenced off for small/young dogs works well as an alternative for puppies and small dogs.

Puppy and small dog area at Token Creek Dog Exercise Area
Permit System

To cover the costs of maintaining Dog Exercise Areas, revenues are generated through the sale of dog permits (See Appendix 8). Self-registration relies on the honor system, but park staff and volunteers check permits as frequently as possible.

Dane County Parks offers daily or annual permits. The annual permit is a tag (similar to a dog license or rabies tag) that must be attached to the dog’s collar. Each year the tag is changed in shape and color to make identifying easier. (see Appendix 9). A dog permit is required to bring a dog into any County Park (leashed or unleashed areas). The daily and annual permit may be purchased at self-registration stations. The fee is deposited in a collection tube that is emptied periodically by the Park Managers or Rangers. The annual permit may also be obtained through the park office, staff, or various vendors (see Appendix 10).

The Dog Exercise Area program has been so popular that it has expanded to include other cities and municipalities within the County. One permit is good for all participating agencies. The cooperation of this community wide program is part of an important linking system that utilizes shared ideas and resources to obtain widespread success.

Regulations

Dane County Parks allows dogs in all parks with a dog permit. Dogs may only be off-leash in designated Dog Exercise Areas. A warning system and fines discourages repeat offenders. Established regulations are posted at the entrance to each park.

Please Obey the Following Rules and Regulations

- Dog owners must purchase a dog permit to have their dog(s) in any Dane County Park.
- Dogs must be restrained on a leash at all times except in designated pet exercise off-leash areas.
- Dogs must be under owner’s control at all times in all areas.
- State law requires dogs to be vaccinated against rabies.
- Dogs must be licensed and wear their identification and permit tags.
- Dog waste in parks is offensive and a health risk. Please clean up and seal waste in a bag before disposing of it in a receptacle.
- Dogs are not allowed on beaches, groomed ski trails or buildings in Dane County Parks.
- City of Madison Parks – dogs allowed in designated areas only.

Rules provide a reminder of proper etiquette and maintain safe actions to protect the users, both dogs and their owners. A more extensive listing of rules that includes the supporting ordinances is provided in Dog Exercise Area Brochures (see Appendix 11).
Maintenance

Parking Areas

Parking areas are gravel and are considered low maintenance areas requiring:
✓ Periodic grading
✓ Perimeter mowing
✓ Garbage pick-up
✓ Winter plowing

Entrance

Entrance areas include:
✓ Gate(s)
✓ Registration board
✓ Fee collection tube
✓ Bulletin board for users
✓ General information signs
✓ Trash cans
✓ Animal waste containers
✓ Waste collection bags

Gates are installed to prevent dogs from leaving the Dog Exercise Area. Heavy use of the entrance requires periodic repairs. The entrance is generally surfaced with gravel; plant material is discouraged to reduce the need for trimming and for sanitary reasons. It is important to get users inside the Dog Exercise Area as fast as possible. Dane County is testing a two-gate system in the future to allow for the ingress and egress of users and reduce the congestion. At the entrance provide only the information required. The area should be kept free of clutter and extra items. This will reduce confusion for the users in registering and maintains an aesthetically pleasing entrance. We now try to have our registration area inside the Dog Exercise Area, or away from the entrance (see Appendix 12).

*****An important note: Take into account the need for a marking post! Install a plain wooden post for dogs to mark on near the entrance or prior to the registration station to lengthen the life of other fence and sign posts. The fee collection tube should also be at a height above the dog-marking level (see Appendix 13).
Grounds

Ground maintenance includes weekly mowing of the paths and some common areas. The paths are generally covered with wood chip mulch. The majority is left unmowed; though the Dog Exercise Area may be mowed or periodically burned to maintain open space and to keep unwanted woody species from growing. Occasionally, Dane County uses Roundup herbicide as a stump treatment. In the case of herbicide/pesticide application, signs are posted to inform Dog Exercise Area users (see Appendix 14). Facilities or attractions such as water access points need special attention. During the winter, snow is packed or plowed to provide year-round access.

Daily Supplies

Park staff regularly stocks Dog Exercise Areas with:

- Waste bags
- Permit envelopes
- Information flyers

Costs

There are some costs associated with Dog Exercise Area maintenance that should be anticipated (see Appendix 15).

- Labor
- Dog waste bags
- Waste removal contractor
- Permits and tags
Volunteers

Volunteers are assets! They:
- Demonstrate public support
- Raise money
- Organize clean-up days and workdays (see Appendix 16)
- Assist on fence installations
- Form organized advocate groups
- Set up web sites such as: www.dogpark.f2s.com

To develop your volunteer base use the people that were the driving force behind the establishment of a Dog Exercise Area. These will be people from the Kennel clubs, Dog Advocate Groups and people that complained the most about not having places to take their dogs. Check with area vendors selling pet supplies and veterinary clinics. Many times if they do not supply people to help, they will provide other resources.

Benefits

Dog Exercise Areas will provide year-round opportunities for dogs to socialize as well as exercise. Both are important to the animal’s health and temperament. Additionally, Dog Exercise Areas:

- Attract more park users
- Generate revenue
- Concentrate dog use in the parks to increase efficiency of park personnel
- Decrease conflicts with other park uses and reduce off-leash violations in other areas
I love these parks! I absolutely think we need more of them.
   - Kerry, owner of Ilsa, a German Shepherd

We come here twice a day because it is easier than trying to walk on a leash.
   - Mike & Bridget, owner of Jake, a Chocolate Lab

Water would be nice, but I understand about the risk for disease transmission.
   - Dog owner at Prairie Moraine

It’s our best running program as far as a day in day out basis... the Dog Exercise Areas are the heaviest used areas that we have.
   - Darren Marsh, Operations Manager

It would be nice to have some dog etiquette information posted about socialization... educational stuff like that would be great.
   - Jean, owner of Bohdi, a Border Collie

You need about ten more parks like this, I just wish there were more parks like this. It’s wonderful!
   - Dog owner of Chocolate Lab & Vizsla mix

You should post a warning if the entire area is not fenced, we have helped several people look for their dogs that have gotten out.
   - Eric and Diana, owners of Karma, a German Shepherd

It’s an excellent resource for the people of Dane County, but it’s just as much a responsibility as a privilege... to keep it a clean and safe place to visit.
   - Patrick Preimesberger, Park Manager

Most of the dogs are real nice and friendly... I think people need to clean up a little more after their dogs.
   - Anna, owner of Bongo, a Wheaten Terrier Chow

I wish there were more areas where he could go swimming, and more off-leash areas.
   - Daniel, owner of Cody, a Golden Retriever
Dane County Dog Exercise Areas

- **Indian Lake** is 30 acres in size; open fields, trails, and swimming pier water access to Indian Lake; contains a portion of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail; partially fenced.

- **Prairie Moraine** is 80 acres in size; a mixture of rolling hills and valleys with no water access; contains a portion of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail and important natural features including a terminal moraine and native oak savanna and prairie remnants; partially fenced.

- **Token Creek North** is 10 acres in size; paths and open areas along Token Creek with swimming pier water access; no fencing.

- **Token Creek South** is 40 acres in size; reclaimed crop field with paths, a separate 5-acre small/young dog area and no water access; completely fenced.

- **Viking** is 15 acres in size; grassland on shoreline of Yahara River with swimming pier water access; completely enclosed (combination water and fencing).

- **Yahara Heights** is 15 acres in size; level reclaimed crop field on the shoreline of Cherokee Marsh with swimming pier water access; completely enclosed (combination water and fencing).
APPENDIX
Dog Exercise Areas
TRAIL CLOSED

DUE TO EROSION PROBLEMS
PLEASE USE MARKED TRAILS

Questions? Please call Davis County Parks Department at 745-0020.
Thank You!

To all the park users who volunteered for the annual spring dog exercise area cleanup. We appreciate the time and effort you took to show how much this park means to you.

Dane County Parks
Adult Conservation Team

For information about volunteering at this park, contact Louise at 246-8306 or gowenlur@co.dane.wi.us.
Indian Lake

- 30 acres
- Water access
- Partially fenced
Prairie Moraine

- 80 acres
- Open fields & trails
- Partially fenced
Token Creek North

- 10 acres
- Water access
- No boundary fencing
ENTRANCE ROAD
PLEASE LEASH DOG
Token Creek South

- 40 acres
- Small dog area
- Completely fenced
ACCESS TRAIL
DOGS MUST BE LEASHED.
WELCOME
TOKEN CREEK
DOG EXERCISE AREA
Viking

- 15 acres
- Water access
- Partially fenced
Yahara Heights

- 15 acres
- Water access
- Completely fenced
LEAVING
PET EXERCISE AREA

ALL PETS MUST BE LEASHED

Dane County Park Commission
DANE COUNTY PARKS

Dog Exercise Areas
Badger Prairie County Park
Indian Lake County Park
Prairie Moraine County Park
Token Creek County Park
Viking County Park
Yahara Heights Resource Area
Badger Prairie
Indian Lake
Prairie Moraine
Prairie Moraine
Token Creek - North Dog Park
Token Creek - North Dog Park
Token Creek - South Dog Park
Token Creek - South Dog Park
Yahara Heights
Viking Park
Viking Park
Anderson Park District

"The Big Backyard" at the Kellogg Park Dog Field

Anderson Township • Cincinnati, Ohio
1. Public Request
   - citizens, hunt club, breed specific organizations.

2. Demographics:
   - Nationally:
     a. 66 million dogs owned in U.S.
     b. 39% of U.S. households own a dog (1.6 dogs/household)
   - Community setting
   - Local demographics

3. Parks Department offering: benefits, new contacts/customers, owner socialization, multi-generational.

4. Type of dog park:
   - urban, suburban, competition, hunting, training.
Site Selection

1. **Location:** Near users, appropriate, vehicular accessibility.

2. **Under utilized property:** Doesn’t need to be prime.

3. **Accessibility:** Provide for physically challenged/topography.

4. **Environmental Concerns:** Wear areas, pests, run-off, feces.

5. **Existing support facilities:** Parking, restrooms, water.
Dog Field Aerial

KELLOGG PARK

Restroom & Concession Building

Soccer field #1
Soccer field #2
Soccer field #3
Soccer field #4

Small Dog Area

Dog Field Area

KELLOGG PARK DOG FIELD
Dog Field Aerial

Small Dog Area

Dog Field Area

Kellogg Park Dog Field
Wide Open Spaces

Kellogg Park Dog Field
Wide Open Spaces

Kellogg Park Dog Field
1. Increasing awareness/gaining support: Media, veterinarians.


3. Fundraising programs:
   – Committee efforts, bricks, improvement donations.

4. Project ambassadors: vets, committee members, neighbors.

5. Dog owner/enthusiast cross section: breeds, types.

6. Insurance underwriting: Your insurance, state and local laws.
Engraved Bricks on the walkway

Donation Forms

Kellogg Park Dog Field
1. Basic facilities: Parking, walkways, water, restrooms, paddocks.

2. Paddock entrance vestibules: Double gates.


4. Owner amenities:
   – Benches, mutt-mitts, trash cans, water, signage.


Owner Amenities

Kellogg Park Dog Field
1. **Registration:** Permit issuance, record keeping, payments.

2. **User rule enforcement:**
   - Law enforcement, user education, volunteers.

3. **Improvement requests:**
   - Safety, engage requestor, committee resolution.

4. **Complaints:** Investigations, user info, enforcement.

5. **Volunteers:**
   - Cathy Lamb: 1200 hours in 2005
   - Lexi Stevenson: Dog Field Newsletter
Permit IDs & Rules

ANDERSON PARK DISTRICT
DOG FIELD RULES

AREA UNDER SURVEILLANCE

1. All users must purchase the required Dog Field Permit and comply with the following requirements to enter Off-Leash Dog Field:
   a. Permit must be worn and visible at all times.
   b. Daily permit holders:
      * Purchase daily permit and drop fee in black box.
      * Hang receipt on Dog Field Permit Board in entry area.
      * Upon departure, take receipt off the Board and if entered, present to an annual permit at the Anderson Park District office.

2. The Off-Leash Dog Field is for dogs, their handlers and those accompanying them.

3. Owners are legally responsible for their dogs and any injury caused by them. If your dog becomes unruly or aggressive, leash immediately and leave the field. In case of incident, owners are required to provide personal information to involved parties.

4. Dogs must be licensed and vaccinated, and wearing a collar with current tags.

5. Dogs under the age of four months are not permitted.

6. Female dogs in season are not permitted.

7. Dog owners must keep their dog(s) in view at all times.

8. There is a limit of 3 dogs per owner at any given time.

9. Clean up and dispose of feces left by your dog per section 511.23.15 of the Ohio Revised Code.

10. Owners must carry a leash at all times. All dogs must be leashed in all other areas of the Anderson Park District.

11. Children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult.

12. Please maintain the safety of the transfer gate system. Do not enter if another dog is within the transfer area.

13. Food and dog treats are not permitted inside the Dog Field.

14. Unattended dogs will be removed by the SPCA.

15. Failure to fulfill annual or daily permit requirements and follow Dog Field rules, subjects a violator to criminal prosecution, and/or being banned from the Field.

Signature ___________________________ Date ______________

Anderson Park District
8249 Clough Pike, Cincinnati, Ohio, 45244
513.474.0003 • www.andersonparkres.com

This area will be closed when adverse conditions exist. Call the APD Hotline before you play! 513.397.6029

Kellogg Park Dog Field
1. Paddock care: Cleanliness, turf care, pest control.

2. Fencing maintenance: Fence, gates, under fence holes.

3. Surfacing care: Mowing, raking, power washing.


5. Snow removal
Walkway & Entrance

Kellogg Park Dog Field
Paddock Entrance

Kellogg Park Dog Field
Paddock Gate & Signage

Kellogg Park Dog Field
Mutt-Mitt Signage

DOG OWNERS:
Please pick up after your pet... even if you think no one is watching!

Don't be a pooper... Use your scooper!
Dog owners, please pick up after your pet.

DOG OWNERS:
Don't give your dog a bad wrap... pick up what they leave behind!

Your fellow park users thank you.
Your fellow park users thank you.
Your fellow park users thank you.

Anderson Park District
AndersonParks.com - 813.474.0003

Kellogg Park Dog Field
Benefits

1. Regional Award
   – Cincinnati Magazine

2. New customer contacts

3. Community awareness of Agency/Parks

4. Owner social interaction and exercise/activity

5. Special events:
   – “Hotdog Parade”
   – “Howl at the Moon”
Special Events

Hotdog Parade

Kellogg Park Dog Field
Special Events

Howl at the Moon

Kellogg Park Dog Field
At Play

Kellogg Park Dog Field
At Play

Kellogg Park Dog Field
Troy Euton
Planning & Development Director
Anderson Park District
(513) 388-5085
Teuton@andersonparks.com
RUNWAY

No access without authorization

Open

Runway pass or dog training permit required