



## Dog Off-Leash Areas Frequently Asked Questions

Three Rivers Park District operates nine dog off-leash areas throughout the park system and each one is intended as a place where dogs and their owners can enjoy recreation together in a fun and natural setting. We strive to maintain a safe and welcoming environment at all of our off-leash areas; however, off-leash areas are use at your own risk, and by using them you are consenting to the risks that may be present.

It is critical that dog owners have verbal control over their dogs at all times while using the off-leash area.

We've compiled this list of Frequently Asked Questions to help you assess whether the off-leash area is right for you and your dog, and to help you plan your visit. If you have further questions, please visit [ThreeRiversParks.org](http://ThreeRiversParks.org) or call 763-559-9000.

### **How can I determine if my dog is ready to visit an off-leash area?**

If your dog is ready to visit an off-leash area, you should be able to answer yes to each of these questions:

- Is my dog over 6 months old and has had their rabies vaccination?
- Is my dog healthy and in good physical condition?
- Does my dog reliably and promptly come back to me when called, when away from their home environment?
- Does my dog come to me when called if they are engaging in play with other dogs or focused on something else besides me?
- Does my dog exhibit appropriate dog relationship skills (doesn't constantly dominate in dog play or isn't completely submissive)?

### **What behaviors should I watch out for or be concerned about?**

Behaviors that may show your dog is not appropriate for the off-leash area include:

- demonstrating a strong prey drive toward other dogs
- intense focusing on another dog (hard stare, hackles up, tail held erect and high, ears and body pointing forward) and is not able to be redirected
- possessive of toys or foods
- not friendly with strangers
- does not respect other dogs' boundaries
- will not back off or isn't able to be called off
- is anxious or fearful
- cowers or continuously tucks tail around other dogs

**What kind of dog behavior is acceptable?**

Acceptable play typically includes chasing, wrestling, growling and mouthing. Although this type of play is usually fine, keep close supervision to prevent it from becoming too rough.

**What kind of dog behavior isn't acceptable?**

Behaviors not allowed include body-slamming, mounting, continuous barking and acting territorial.

**Can I leash my dog in the off-leash area?**

Once inside the area, dogs should be off leash, except as a temporary measure to re-direct activity. Do not let your unleashed dog approach leashed dogs; a leashed dog cannot escape a tense or scary situation, making its behavior less predictable.

**I have a small dog. Do they have to use the small/frail dog area or can they be in the large dog area?**

We don't set minimum or maximum size requirements for a dog to use the small/frail dog area versus the large dog area; rather, we anticipate that dog owners will make the best decision about which area is right for their dog.

Generally, we recommend that dogs weighing 25 pounds or less will be more comfortable in the small/frail dog area. We understand that larger dogs that interact appropriately with small dogs may be better suited in the small/frail dog area as well – for instance, if they are older, are more accustomed to small dogs, and/or are less comfortable with the high-energy play that can occur in the large dog area. Additionally, some small dogs may be better suited to the large dog area, and we trust dog owners to use their best judgment about the right fit for their dog.

**Another owner asked me to take my dog away from their dog, but my dog just wants to play. What should I do?**

Call your dog to you. Please respect other users' concerns and comply with requests to separate dogs, even if their behavior appears normal to you.

**I'm concerned about another dog's behavior toward my dog. What should I do?**

Speak up. Say to the other owner, "We need to separate these dogs. Please call your dog away, and I'll call mine." If necessary, repeat the request. Then, walk in opposite directions.

**What should I do if my dog or I get injured?**

Injuries are very uncommon but may occur during normal play or occasionally because of aggressive behavior. Remain calm and be courteous. Exchange contact information with the other owner(s) and any witnesses. Trade rabies vaccination numbers with the other owner(s). If you must leave for immediate veterinary attention, ask a witness to get this information. If the other owner refuses to provide contact information, get their vehicle's license plate number and report it to Three Rivers Park District Public Safety. For serious injuries to humans or dogs, call 911 and ask for Three Rivers Park District Public Safety.

**Remember: Every owner is responsible for damage or harm caused by their dog.****What should I do if I observe an unsafe situation?**

Call 911 and ask for Three Rivers Park District Public Safety; at Cleary Lake, Murphy-Hanrehan and Spring Lake, ask for the Scott County Sheriff's Department.

**Can I bring food or toys?**

A few training treats are allowed; all other food items – for humans and dogs – should be left at home. Toys are allowed but be aware that some dogs may be possessive of toys. Make sure to grab all of your belongings when you leave.

**Can I bring my children?**

Yes. Anyone ages 15 or younger must be supervised by an adult. Do not allow your child to approach a dog without first asking for and receiving the owner's permission. Immediately move your child away from a dog if the owner asks you to do so.

**Is there a place I can train my dog for hunting?**

Lake Sarah and Crow-Hassan dog off-leash areas allow starter pistols with a Special Use Permit from the Park Supervisor. Use of firearms or devices considered firearms is prohibited under federal law.

**Can dogs swim in off-leash area ponds? Is it safe for my dog?**

Visitors can have their dogs swim in the off-leash area ponds at their own risk. The ponds are not tested for potentially harmful parasites or bacteria. Staff may periodically close the ponds due to reports of illness or visual observation of water quality concerns.