

2009/09/16

Mt. Douglas Park and Dogs

Due to a recent reported dog attack at Mt. Doug Park, Pound members have increased enforcement patrols at the park. From these patrols, bylaw issues such as a lack of dog control, unclaimed excrement, and environmental damage in the park have surfaced. Pound members have observed and spoken with dog walkers, park volunteers, and park users for the past three weeks to obtain information in recognizing issues and potential problems involving dogs in the park space. The following are concerns that Pound members have recognized as problems involving dog usage within Mt. Douglas Park.

Effective Control of Dogs:

Presently, Mt. Douglas Park is a designated off-leash park year-round with the exception of the lower portion of the park located at 4525 Cordova Bay Road (beach, picnic, and playground area) which prohibits dogs from May to August inclusive.

There are a variety of dog owners and dog walkers utilizing the park trails. Most individual dog owners observed are not walking more than three dogs whereas "professional" dog walking companies (run by a single individual) have been observed walking up to 12 dogs at one time. When asked, some of these professional dog walking companies did not hold a valid business licence as required.

Individual owners, with 1-3 dogs in their control, have made comments in regards to dog walking companies in care of groups of dogs as being not under effective control. Pound members have observed this issue first hand and agree that one person cannot effectively control more than five dogs. On various occasions during our visit to the park, Pound members, while speaking with dog walkers, have informed the dog walker that one of their dogs have left them. To the walker's surprise, the dogs can be as far as 300 metres down the trail, out of visual site.

Some dog walking company owners have argued the fact that they do have effective control over 10-12 dogs but this is usually in a controlled environment (private property). In Mt. Doug Park, there is a variety of stimuli that demand a dog's attention away from the owner or walker controlling the dog. Pound members have witnessed this first hand while visiting the park:

Pound members were speaking with a professional dog walker who had care and control of ten dogs, three on leash and seven off-leash. A woman with one dog, on leash, approached on the trail. From approximately 50 feet away the woman asked the dog walker to control her dogs so she could pass without incident. The dog walker was unable to control the seven off-leash dogs with voice commands. The result was five of the off-leash dogs swarmed the single on-leash dog. Although the woman and her dog

were able to pass without incident, the woman was very nervous and upset over the scene.

On occasion, while walking the trails of the park, Pound members have been approached by dogs with no owners in sight. Individuals (including Pound members) in this situation do not know whether the dogs are friendly and are unaware of the dog's intentions. Parents with children have complained of this issue to Pound members while on the park trails. Some dog owners are comfortable with this situation and feel that their dog is fully capable of walking the trails without constant supervision. Pound members remind dog owners that dogs are animals and can react in various instinctive ways sometimes resulting in aggression. (Pound members are all-too-familiar with the comment "I cannot believe my dog did that," after the fact.)

Feces:

Pound members have monitored the Mt. Doug area (specifically the Glendenning entrance) for approximately three weeks. Pound members have spoken with individuals, individual dog owners, and dog walking companies regarding the feces issue within the park.

A group of Mt. Doug Park Volunteers who spend their time removing invasive plant species have voiced their opinions to Pound members stating that the amount of dog feces off the trail is disturbing. Volunteers are contacting the feces on their gloves, clothing, and foot-ware as they remove plant material. Volunteers feel this is a health hazard and unsafe.

Pound members have recognized that a large percentage of dogs defecate within 200 metres of the parking lot after being release from the vehicle. In this area, there is a large quantity (approximately 100 piles) of feces unclaimed by the owner or dog walker.

Pound members have observed dog walking companies that utilize the Mt. Doug trails with ten dogs. These dogs are released (unleashed) from the vehicle at the Glendenning entrance and make their way up the trail. Some of the dogs explore the underbrush, slightly off the trail, where they disappear visually while other dogs of the group stay on the trail. It has been observed that a dog walker with ten dogs managed to remove excrement from one of the ten dogs. This one dog defecated on the trail. Unfortunately, the dogs in the underbrush could not be observed of whether they were defecating or not.

Another issue involving feces includes the use of "poop bags" which are used to clean-up the feces but are left on the trails for future removal. The idea is that the owner or dog walker removes the bags on return to their vehicle. Complaints have been made to Pound members from a variety of individuals, including dog owners, that the park is a natural setting and that the last thing they want to observe is garbage on the trails. Pound

members have also been advised by parents that their children sometimes pick-up and or stomp on the bags left on the ground resulting in a mess.

At the Blenkinsop Road entrance to Mt. Doug Park, Pound members observed 11 bags of dog feces under the sign that holds a map of the park. These bags have remained at this entrance untouched from 09 09 04 and still remain at this location.

Dog walkers/owners that have been spoken to by Pound members advise they would like to see more garbage cans located within the park on the trails. Pound members do not recommend this as a solution, as garbage cans located within a natural park setting will encourage the wildlife to pick through the garbage causing further mess. This would also increase the workload to Saanich Park's staff that would now be required to walk through the trails to pick up the additional garbage.

In researching this same topic to ascertain how other cities are tackling this same problem, Pound members have learned that Toronto, Seattle and Vancouver have attempted to resolve the dog feces issue in a number of ways. The methods that have been tried, such as: a green bin pilot program and a septic waste pilot program, were done at a considerable expense to the City of Toronto and were not pursued for a variety of reasons, as well as not being effective. Large urban centers are now going with a carry-in/carry-out park programs which have typically included all forms of garbage that the park user's are carrying into the park and are now being encouraged to carry out of the park (carry-in/carry-out program).

Over the last three weeks, dog owners and dog walkers have been advised by the Pound to not leave bags of feces on the trail and that the bags immediately have to be removed and disposed of properly as per the Saanich Animals Bylaw.

There is a strong correlation between a dog on leash and the dog's feces being cleaned-up by the owner. When a dog has the ability to roam freely, away from the owner and in the underbrush of the forest, the dog's actions are not being observed by the owner. When a dog is securely fastened to a leash, the dog is usually within 5-12 feet of the owner allowing the owner to observe the dog's actions.

Dog Population VS Environmental Damage:

Pound members observe approximately 30-40 dogs per hour being walked via the Glendenning entrance. This equates to approximately 300-400 dogs in a ten hour period entering the park from the Glendenning entrance only. Pound members have not been able to monitor dog numbers at the other four major entrances to the park.

Like it or not, dogs have an environmental impact in Mt. Doug Park. The increase of dog populations in the park correlates to the parks environmental damage. That damage

increases throughout the park as dogs are able to wander off the trails, unleashed. Stories of dogs chasing and killing deer, chasing squirrels, and hunting ground nesting birds are common. And as dog owners allow their dog to use the park as an excrement waste facility, the owners must be educated that dog feces is **not** a natural by-product and does not belong in a natural setting such as Mt. Douglas Park. Many citizens of the dog-walking community utilize Mt. Doug because of its natural setting, not realizing that it is their actions that are destroying the parks natural beauty and chasing off its natural inhabitants.

Recommendations:

- 1) Increase the minimum fine amount for failing to remove the dog feces.
- 2) Increase pro-active enforcement on the weekends and irregular hours.
- 3) Create a bylaw which limits the amount of dogs in a person's care and control.
- 4) In future, consider the park as a leash required area.

Increase the fine amount for "Failing to Remove Dog Feces" in the MTI schedule from a \$50.00 fine to \$250.00. This particular problem is an ever increasing health concern.

Pound members contacted Animal Control agencies in Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto. Both Vancouver and Calgary have increased all of their minimum fine amounts to \$250.00 with the maximum fine amount set at \$2,000.00. Toronto's minimum fines are set at \$240.00.

All of the above cities have indicated they have seen an increase in compliance with their municipal bylaws as a result of increasing their fines substantially.

Pound members would also like to see an increase in pro-active enforcement in the parks. Utilize the Relief Pound Inspector to work after regular office hours and on weekends. This would increase compliance as most of the problems are reported as occurring outside of our regular office hours.

Create a bylaw which limits the amount of dogs one person can have under their care and control in a public setting. Toronto has enacted a permit system to limit the number of dogs allowed under the control of a Commercial Dog Walker to a maximum of (6) dogs, at any one time in City parks, green spaces or waterfront areas.

Saanich Pound members are recommending a maximum of five dogs being under one person's care and control at a time in a public place. This is consistent with the number of dogs allowed in Saanich per parcel of land. More than five dogs together can create a "pack mentality" where problems will inevitably arise. By limiting the number of dogs to five, this will allow for a more manageable environment for dog owners and other park users.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Ryan #601
Derek Rees #886

Enforcement at Mount Douglas Park:

Enforcement has been conducted at Mt. Doug Park on the following dates and times by Pound Inspectors Susan Ryan and Derek Rees:

09 08 26 – 1330-1445 hours – Glendenning Road entrance
09 08 27 – 1048 hours – Glendenning Road entrance
09 08 28 – 0901-0919 hours – 4410 Cedar Hill Road
09 09 02 – 1415-1500 hours – Glendenning Road entrance
09 09 04 – 1005-1130 hours – Glendenning Road entrance
 1354 hours – Blenkinsop Road entrance
 1410 hours – Cedar Hill Road fire lane entrance
09 09 08 – 0900-946 hours – Glendenning Road entrance
09 09 10 – 1050-1110 hours – Glendenning Road entrance
 1113-1120 hours – Blenkinsop Road entrance
09 09 11 – 1008-1205 hours – Glendenning Road entrance

Enforcement of the Saanich Animals bylaw #8556 which prohibits dogs during the months of May-August, inclusive: “Mount Douglas Park Beach and that part of Mount Douglas Park bounded by Cordova Bay Road, Ash Road, Douglas Creek, the natural boundary of the ocean and the northwesterly boundary of the park, EXCEPT the asphalt road surface lying to the northwest of the picnic area between the two gates”.

This would be the “lower lot” or 4525 Cordova Bay Road. Enforcement of the prohibited area was conducted by Relief Pound Inspector Gibson on:

09 08 21 – 1920-1850 hours
09 08 22 – 1830-1930 hours
09 09 01 – 1455-1550 hours

Stats:

2008	Calls for Service	MTI's Issued
Bill Storey (LTD)	262	0
Susan Ryan	672	21
Derek Rees (relief)	240	7
Paul Rioux (relief)	129	3

2009

Bill Storey (LTD)	0	0
Susan Ryan	446	25
Derek Rees (relief)	438	28
Mike Gibson (relief)	50	0
Devon Stringer (relief)	50	1
Paul Rioux	0	0

Complaints received in Mount Doug Park for 2008:

4525 Cordova Bay Road (lower lot – beach access) – 0

4410 Cedar Hill Road (main park access) – 5 bylaw related complaints, 6 deceased animal/cougar sightings.

Complaints received in Mount Doug Park for 2009:

4525 Cordova Bay Road – 1 bylaw related complaint, 3 deceased animal/cougar sightings.

4410 Cedar Hill Road – 1 bylaw related complaint, 3 deceased animal/cougar sightings.

