

SECTION 4 A LOOK AT SUCCESSFUL DOG PARKS IN OTHER COMMUNITIES

Recognizing that Belfast is a unique place with its own special history, politics, landscape, and foibles, as well as a staunchly independent spirit, the dog-park study group nonetheless felt it important to learn about off-leash areas in other towns. To find out what might be most appropriate for our own community, we researched dog-park web sites via the internet, we visited off-leash areas in communities both in-state and out of state, and we spoke with individuals living in Waldo County who have had experiences with off-leash areas in other places.



The city of Belfast would bear no liability for activity at a free, public dog park; liability for dog behavior would reside with individual dog owners, as it does currently.

Despite the great variety in the size, fencing, and amenities among the parks, we discovered that all adhere to essentially the same rules and all were clean and free of dog waste. One popular feature that impressed us was a covered bin to hold dog park users' guides offering information about city ordinances, park rules, pet-friendly accommodations in the area, other nearby parks and hiking trails, and local veterinarian and dog services. Interestingly, most of the dog parks we investigated were part of or adjacent to other, larger recreational areas such as playing fields, pools, or other municipal facilities.

The most striking commonality among them all, however, is that the pet owners we spoke to were overwhelmingly positive in their praise of their local dog parks and openly appreciative for the opportunity these places offer for exercising their dogs. In general they were also very friendly people, happy to talk to other dog owners and eager to help them get the most out of their local parks. Clearly, we learned, people socialize at dog parks as much as the dogs.

DOG PARKS VISITED

PORTLAND, MAINE

About an acre in size and enclosed by a chain link fence, Portland's Valley Street Dog Park is located in the West End close to the downtown commercial district, adjacent to a heavily traveled city street. It has trees, benches, gravel, and grass (though much of it has worn away). At some point the area had been mulched, but maintenance has evidently been lax. Even though the area seems a bit shabby, it is surprisingly clean throughout. Amenities in-



A shelter at Portland's Quarry Run offers dog owners shade and a place to sit.

clude a water spigot, metal water dishes, and trashcans, as well as bag dispensers.

Portland's only other fenced dog park, Quarry Run, is located about five miles from downtown on the site of an old landfill. The six-acre area has rolling hills, winding pathways, and a lot of foliage. There is a shelter and some benches, but there was a curious lack of trashcans during our visit. Inside the park is a smaller, fenced area, about 50'x 50', evidently for isolating smaller dogs or unsocialized dogs, but it lacked any signage explaining what it was for. An unfavorable feature is that, due to the topography, dogs can easily be out of their owner's sight.

DENVILLE, NEW JERSEY

Part of a recreational area that includes soccer and baseball fields, Happy Hound Playground is a fenced two-acre park with separate small- and large-dog areas. Adirondack-style chairs, benches, shelters, water, plastic-bag dispensers, and trashcans are among the standard amenities. But at this park there is also an agility course set up for the dogs and a collection of dog toys scattered about for all to use. In contrast to other dog parks we visited, this one is under the management of the local health department; Denville's animal control officer monitors the park and visits often in a supervisory role. Access to the park is by membership only, with annual fees ranging from \$35 for residents to \$50 for non-residents. In the little more than a year that the park has been open, it has built a membership of 267.



Pet drinking fountain.

LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

The city's six-acre dog park, enclosed with horse-farm plank fencing (and mesh), is located within Masterson Station Park, a 40-acre municipal park on the outskirts of town. It is grassy, has mature trees, and has its own water hydrant.

Lexington also has a three-acre dog park located at Jacobson Park, another of the community's several huge municipal recreation areas. The dog park here is fenced with chain link and has a tree line. It is grassy but otherwise has few amenities within the fenced area. The park itself, however, has a lake, picnic areas, trails, many trees, and is very popular.



Bulletin boards come in handy for announcing events, workshops, lost dogs, and other news for dog owners.

MIDLAND, TEXAS

This is a relatively new dog park and it is part of a much larger sports complex. The total dog park

site is about five acres, with one and a half acres reserved for small dogs. It's all surrounded by chain-link fencing, and amenities include drinking fountains. The very active group of users organizes pool days, pooch parties, and other fun recreational activities involving people and their dogs.

ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO

As in most of the off-leash areas we visited, this park has chain-link fencing, a shelter, drinking water, and separate areas for small and large dogs. It is grassy and like all the others uses double gates for safety.

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA



At this park, the groundcover is woodchips rather than grass.

This is a regional park about five miles out of town, located next to a botanical garden. The surface for dogs to play on is wood chips and there is a concrete sidewalk through the park. Trees, shelters, and benches are located inside the park as well as a large informational kiosk and attractive wooden trash cans. Its water spigot, hose, and large tub basins sit on terra cotta tiles.

PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

This park includes separate areas for small dogs and large dogs and features a striking, artist-designed, ornamental fence. This is a grassy area with a concrete entrance and sidewalk around part of the perimeter. Shade trees, shelters, and benches add to the comfort.



Fencing at this fancy California dog park is as decorative as it is practical.

OTHER DOG PARKS

Dog parks visited by others with whom our group has spoken include those in Overland Park, Kansas; Charleston, South Carolina; and Denver, Colorado. Belfast residents who have used these parks had complimentary reports about each. One local resident who has a second home in Charleston said she chose to locate in that city in part because it had such a great dog park.