

OFF-LEASH AREA USER STUDY:

CHATFIELD STATE PARK

Conducted for:
Colorado State Parks

Research by:
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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Business Research Division at the Leeds School of Business (BRD) was asked by Colorado State Parks to conduct a survey of visitors who use the off-leash dog-walking areas at two Colorado state parks, Chatfield and Cherry Creek. The survey assessed the conditions at the parks in April, May, June, and the first week of July 2008. This report addresses the survey responses from the Chatfield off-leash area. It should be noted that this was a survey of people who are visitors to the dog training area rather than general park visitors. In addition, it is the understanding of the BRD research team that people desiring to conduct formal sport dogs training rarely frequent the area due to the high number of off leash dogs.

METHODOLOGY

The BRD research team worked with Colorado State Parks to design the survey instrument. Based on feedback from parks staff, the survey was revised and finalized. It was determined that the survey would be administered by park volunteers. The BRD team members conducted a training session with a number of the volunteers in order to facilitate a smooth, consistent surveying process. As the surveys were completed by the park volunteers, they were mailed to the BRD for data entry and analysis. The data were double entered to verify accuracy and analyzed.

SURVEY RESULTS

This section explores the survey findings. A total of 281 surveys were gathered from the Chatfield off-leash area. Surveying was carried out on weekdays and weekends and throughout the day to ensure that an adequate representation of all visitors was obtained.

Respondent Demographics

- Of the 281 surveys completed, nearly 65% of the respondents were females. Male respondents totaled 35%.
- Approximately 46% of respondents visited the dog area with one dog. Another 37% had two dogs. Only 15% of respondents had three or more dogs with them.
- Fifty percent of respondents were between 35 and 54 years of age. People over 55 composed 24% of respondents. Approximately 20% of

respondents were between 25 and 34. Roughly 6% of responses came from people 24 years old or younger.

- The majority (nearly 59%) of respondents were at the dog park alone. Another 31 percent were with one other person. Approximately 10% of responses came from groups comprised of three or more members.
- Respondents traveled from varying distances to enjoy the park. Nearly 36% traveled 11 or more miles, 33% journeyed between 6 and 10 miles, and 31% came 5 miles or less.
- Many respondents are frequent visitors to the park. The most common visiting pattern for respondents was 2-3 times per week (30%). Twenty-two percent visit 4-5 times per week. Nearly 20% reported they visit the park 6-7 times per week. However, another 28% visit the park 1 time per week or less.
- Eighty-four percent of respondents hold yearly passes to the park.

Experience at Area

Generally, respondents have a very positive perception of the off-leash area’s level of safety for dogs. More than 73% said it is “very safe” and another 22% categorized the area as “safe.” Only 0.7% of respondents found the park “not very safe.”

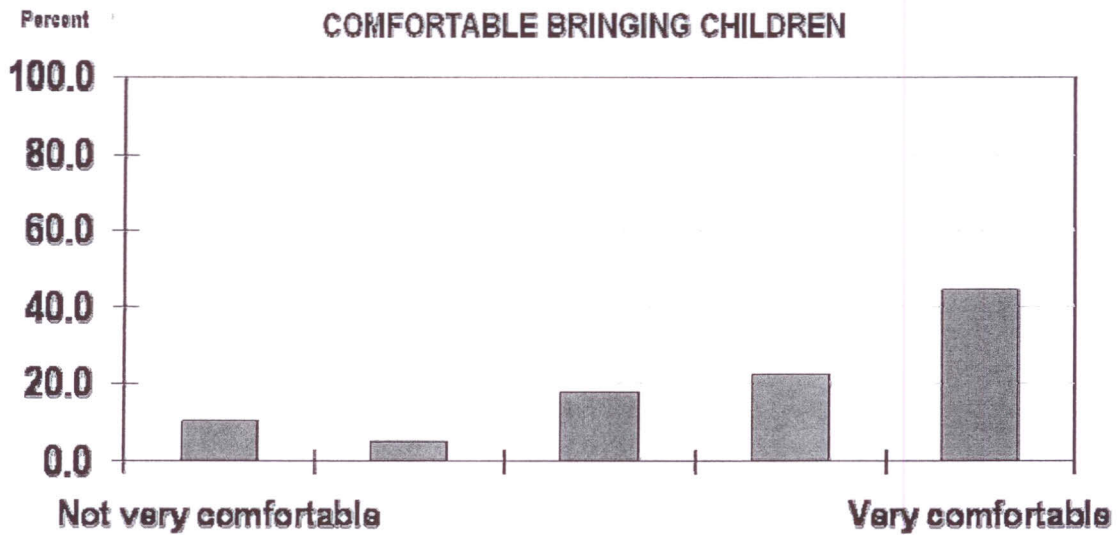
Additionally, respondents indicated that they feel the area is safe for people, with 82% responding that the area is “very safe” and 14% reporting that it is “safe.”

SAFETY OF OFF-LEASH AREA^a

	Not Very Safe	←—————→			Very Safe
Safety for dogs	0.7%	0.0%	3.9%	22.2%	73.1%
Safety people	0.7%	0.0%	2.8%	14.2%	82.2%

^aPercentage of respondents indicating rating.

Responses were slightly less positive when respondents were asked how comfortable they would be bringing small children into the area. Nearly 45% said they would be “very comfortable” and 22% indicated they would be “comfortable.” Another 18% said they would be neutral in bringing children to the area (they chose “3” on a 5-point scale). Finally, just over 15% reported that they would be “not very comfortable” or “uncomfortable.”



An overwhelming majority of those surveyed, 95%, said that limiting the number of dogs per owner would not improve their experience.

The survey asked respondents whether they had experienced or witnessed any conflicts in the park on the day they were surveyed, as well as within the past year. The most frequent type of conflict witnessed on the day the survey was conducted was between dogs, with 7.5% of respondents witnessing such conflicts. Conflicts between dogs and people, dogs and horses, dogs and wildlife, dogs and bicyclists, and dogs and fishermen, and between dog owners were all experienced or witnessed by less than 2% of respondents.

Over the course of the year the likelihood that a respondent had experienced or witnessed a conflict increased. In the past year, 36% had witnessed conflict between dogs, 12% between dogs and bicyclists, 11% between dog owners, 5% between dogs and fishermen, and 5% between dogs and people. Reports of conflicts between dogs and wildlife, and dogs and horses were limited (1.4% and 0.0%, respectively).

CONFLICT WITNESSED IN THE OFF-LEASH AREA

	Dogs and People	Dogs and Horses	Dogs and Other Dogs	Dogs and Wildlife	Dogs and Bicyclists	Dog Owners	Dogs and Fishermen
Percent witnessed on day surveyed	1.1%	0.0%	7.5%	0.4%	1.4%	0.4%	1.4%
Percent witnessed in the past year	5.0%	0.0%	36.3%	1.4%	12.1%	11.0%	5.3%

Overall, respondents view the park very favorably. When asked to rate the quality of their experience, more than 80% rated it “excellent,” and roughly 19% rated it “good.” In addition, more than 80% of respondents indicated that this dog area is “better than most” other dog areas. No respondents rated it as “not as good as most” and 14% indicated that it is the only area that they visit.

RATING OF OFF-LEASH AREA EXPERIENCE

	Poor	←—————→	Excellent
Percent indicating rating	0.0%	0.0%	80.4%

OFF LEASH AREA COMPARED TO OTHERS

	Better than Most	Average	Not as Good as Most	Only Area I Visit	First Visit
Percent indicating response	80.1%	2.5%	0.0%	14.4%	2.9%

Respondents with a yearly pass were asked the importance of various factors in buying the pass. Not surprisingly, more than 96% indicated that the dog park was “very important.” One-quarter said the bike trails were “very important.” The prevalence of wildlife was very important to 38% of respondents. An area to ride horses was rated as very important by nearly 11% of respondents. Responses in the “other” category varied greatly, with boating and other water sports, camping, and fishing mentioned most frequently.

IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS FOR PURCHASING YEARLY PASS

	Not Important	←—————→	Very Important
Dog park	0.8%	0.8%	96.4%
Bike trails	38.9	6.3	25.1
Prevalence of wildlife	22.5	6.5	37.9
Area to ride horses	70.1	8.3	10.8

Visitors to the off-leash areas also visit other Colorado state parks, with 64% indicating that they visit more than just the off-leash areas.

Finally, respondents were asked what would make their experience at the off-leash area better. Responses were diverse, but a few major trends emerged. Those surveyed indicated that more trash cans and bags for picking up dog waste would be beneficial. Similarly, respondents suggested enforcing rules to pick up after dogs and introducing rules for owner responsibility (in the form of increased signage). Respondents expressed interest in cleaner water areas and improved bathroom facilities, and proposed having regular “park clean-up” days.