

PUBLIC FEEDBACK ON CHATFIELD AND CHERRY CREEK STATE PARK DOG TRAINING AREAS



OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS
RECEIVED DURING PUBLIC COMMENT
PERIOD: JULY 14-AUGUST 21, 2009



SEPTEMBER 2009

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PUBLIC FEEDBACK ON STATE PARKS DOG TRAINING AREAS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview and detailed analysis of the public comments received by Colorado State Parks during the public comment period (July 14-August 21, 2009) for the dog training area (DTA) planning process at Cherry Creek and Chatfield State Parks. To conduct the analysis of public comments, State Parks Planning staff entered and coded substantive comments within a Microsoft Access database created by Hertzman Consulting, LLC. Staff categorized issues into main categories and sub-categories that were determined based on: 1) Common themes observed in the comments and 2) Anticipated management concerns by the dog training area planning team. Each substantive comment was linked to an issue code and any contact information provided by the document's sender. Key findings from the public comment period are highlighted below:

- State Parks received a combined total of 1,045 open house comment cards, emails, and written letters during the public comment period.
- The primary groups represented in the comments included: recreational dog owners, followed by equestrian and sport dog trainers. Two noteworthy contributors included State Senator Nancy Spence and Representative David Balmer.
- Planning staff coded a total of 4,005 substantive comments.
- Top issues at both parks:
 1. Excessive dog waste due to people not picking up after their dogs
 2. Access to quality water play areas for dogs
 3. Limited conflicts between users (non-issue)
 4. Unavailability of other quality off-leash areas in metro Denver
 5. Lack of owner control over their dog(s)
- Top suggestions/comments for both parks:
 1. Keep off-leash area open to all users
 2. Maintain off-leash policy as opposed to enforcing on-leash rules
 3. Majority of users purchase annual park pass
 4. Segregate users (dogs, horses, bicyclists) to minimize conflict
 5. Supports additional trash cans and dog waste bag dispensers
- About 12% of commenters would support a fee increase.
- About 10% of commenters expressed a strong interest in volunteering to help manage, maintain, or enforce rules at the dog training area.



“State Parks set aside some land—not particularly pristine land—and wound up with a wildly successful program. Pat yourself on the back!” -George Merritt

REPORT LAYOUT AND INTENT

This report is organized into five main sections. First, the methodology reviews how Planning staff compiled public comments into a database and used the data for analysis. Second, key findings from public comments are summarized for the dog training areas at both Cherry Creek and Chatfield State Parks. The third and fourth sections sort key findings at each individual park. The last section highlights important conclusions and offers suggestions for future action. The dog training areas are commonly referred to as DTAs throughout the report.

GOALS AND PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. Provide additional context of the main issues portrayed by dog training area users and interest groups, beyond the original reports and preliminary findings.
2. Provide dog training area planning team with quantitative and qualitative data regarding top issues and suggestions for the DTAs, combined and for individual parks.
3. Provide dog training area planning team with a list of salient points, key recommendations, and useful suggestions by issue to guide future management of the DTAs.

METHODOLOGY

Colorado State Parks invited the public to email or submit written comments about the dog training areas at Cherry Creek State Park and Chatfield State Park from July 14 through August 21, 2009. In addition, each park hosted a public open house forum in July 2009 to reveal findings from several baseline studies centering on the dog training areas and discuss issues with Parks staff. Also during the open houses, the public was invited to write and submit “comment cards” to Parks staff.

Planning staff gathered all open house comment cards, written and emailed documents at the end of the public comment period for detailed analysis. In August 2009, Staff enlisted the help of Randy Hertzman of Hertzman Consulting LLC, to create a database to code substantive issues and suggestions from the public and collect public contact information for future correspondence.¹

¹ This database was designed to be applicable to future public input projects by Colorado State Parks.

Planning staff combined all documents received (open house comment cards, emails, and written documents) to calculate the total number of comments. In doing so, Parks staff should be aware of inflation of opinion due to commenters who submitted more than one document.² The data in this report reflects the combined total of all documents received, unless otherwise noted. Readers of this report should also be aware that more than one person may have signed a document, leading to higher count of total commenters than total documents. Staff categorized comments into main categories (Table 1) and sub-categories (Table 2) that were determined based on 1) Common themes observed in the comments and 2) Anticipated management concerns by the dog training area planning team. Each substantive comment was linked to an issue code in the database and any contact information provided by the document’s sender.

Upon completing data entry, Planning staff used the three report functions in the database to conduct analysis. The three report functions available are:

- 1) The *Number of Comments by Issue* report displays the number and percentage of comments received for each issue, subtotaled by park.
- 2) The *Comments for Selected Issues* report displays the number of comments, and optionally additional text, for one or more issues.
- 3) The *Rankings* report displays the top issues selected by the report user for each park and for both parks combined.

Parks staff separated comments into two areas for final analysis: “issues” and “suggestion or comment”. If a comment specified a problem with the dog training area, it was categorized as an “issue”. If a comment was action-oriented or provided a general remark about the dog training area, the comment was regarded as a “suggestion or comment”. The results from this process are outlined in this report.

Code	Category Description
1000	Fees and Revenue
2000	Animal Waste and Garbage
3000	Facilities and Amenities
4000	Natural Environment
5000	On-leash/ Off-leash Policy
6000	User Conflicts
7000	Conflicts with Wildlife
8000	Use of Dog Training Area
9000	Etiquette and Rule Enforcement
10000	Size of Dog Training Area

* “Comments” are defined as emails, written documents, or open house comment cards.

² Many of the same persons who attended the open houses may have also submitted additional comments via email.

Code	Comment Description	Comment Type
1001	Supports increasing fees on users to pay for maintenance	Suggestion
1003	Purchases annual pass specifically to use dog park	Comment
2001	Feels that people don't clean up after their dogs	Issue
2002	Suggestion regarding dog waste	Suggestion
2003	Supports a monthly/annual clean-up day	Comment
2004	Supports additional trash cans and dog waste bag dispensers	Comment
2005	Disapproves of horse owners not cleaning up after their horses	Issue
2006	Litter	Issue
3001	Supports more pet-friendly facilities, improvements, or amenities	Comment
3002	Access to water play areas	Issue
3003	Suggests more enclosures/ fenced-in boundaries	Suggestion
4001	Supports rotating sections of park to restore landscape	Comment
4002	Opposes rotating sections of park to restore landscape	Comment
4003	No significant impact on wildlife and vegetation	Issue
4004	No significant impact on soil and water quality	Issue
4005	Significant damage to wildlife and vegetation	Issue
5001	Keep dogs on leash	Suggestion
5002	Keep dogs off-leash	Suggestion
6001	Dog on dog altercations	Issue
6002	Dog/horse conflicts	Issue
6003	Dog/bicycle conflicts	Issue
6004	Limited or No conflicts observed	Issue
6005	Dog/human conflicts	Issue
6006	Other conflict	Issue
7001	Dogs disturb wildlife	Issue
8001	Keep dog park open to all users	Suggestion
8002	Keep dog park open for dog training purposes only	Suggestion
8003	Overcrowded	Issue
8004	Keep park open to equestrian use	Suggestion
8005	Restrict or monitor outside access	Suggestion
8006	Increased traffic and parking volume	Issue
8007	Supports segregating users (dog/horse/bicyclists)	Comment
8008	Feels there are few or no other off-leash dog parks in Metro Denver	Issue
9001	Suggests more public education	Suggestion
9002	Enforce rules through a Ranger/ fines	Suggestion
9003	Enforce rules through additional signage	Suggestion
9004	Other suggestion about enforcing rules	Suggestion
9005	Lack of owner control over dog	Issue
9006	Limit number of dogs per person	Suggestion
10001	Maintain current size of dog park	Suggestion
10002	Increase size or add additional off-leash areas	Suggestion

* "Comments" are defined as emails, written documents, or open house comment cards.

KEY FINDINGS COMMON TO BOTH PARKS

The overwhelming majority of the public expressed their appreciation for having such unique, accessible, and large areas to exercise and socialize their dogs off-leash. Many felt the DTAs provide physical and mental health benefits for both owners and their pets, and enhance community safety by training and socializing dogs, and fill a niche in off-leash recreation in metro Denver. However, the public also recognized that the increasing popularity of the DTAs have led to some serious issues. Table 3 ranks all comments received during the public comment period, pertaining to the DTAs at Cherry Creek and Chatfield State Parks. Figures 1 and 2 (with corresponding Tables 4 and 5) display the top ten issues, suggestions, and general remarks about the DTAs. This section concludes with a detailed discussion about each comment sub-category listed in the table rankings.

General Observations

- Most of the public understand and want to find solutions that will accommodate all users. There were quite a few comments about conflicts, but most conflicts seem to be isolated incidents and were not a pressing issue overall.
- Comments reflected a general misunderstanding of semantics associated with what to call the DTA. Some people referred to the DTA as the “dog park” and others, “dog training area”. Proposed management solutions should reflect the name given to this area of the park.³
- Recreational dog owners did not understand the needs/desires of hunting dog owners, leading to misguided one-size-fits-all suggestions from both sides. Some commenters were taken by surprise that Cherry Creek and Chatfield DTAs were originally *hunting* dog training areas.
- A few commenters who mentioned they purchase annual passes specifically to use the DTAs (16.6% of total comments) threatened to demand their money back or never purchase an annual pass again if the DTAs became unavailable to them.
- Many commenters felt that because they are taxpaying citizens, they have a right to decide how State Parks should use their land.
- Many commenters relayed dissatisfaction with the *Off-Leash Area User Study* (Leeds School of Business, University of Colorado Boulder, July 2008), complaining the study was not an accurate representation of all users. The horse community in particular felt excluded from the study.
- Regarding the three studies: *The Effects of Off-Leash Dog Areas on Birds and Small Mammals in Cherry Creek and Chatfield State Parks* (Ensign Technical Services, Inc., June 2008), *The Influence of Pet Recreation Areas on Soil and Water Quality at Chatfield State Park* (GEI Consultants, September 2008) and *The Influence of Pet Recreation Areas on Soil and Water Quality at Cherry Creek State Park* (GEI Consultants, September 2008); many commenters felt environmental impacts were negligible and inconclusive.

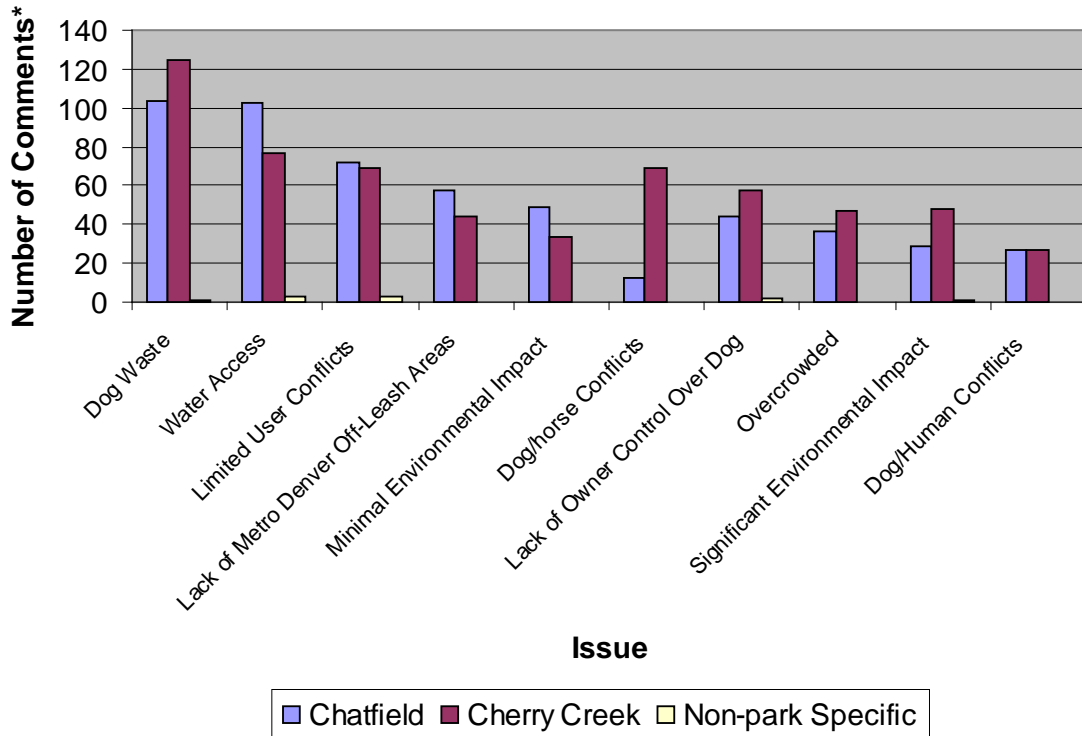
³ There is currently no formal definition for an off-leash area in Colorado State Law, Title 33-10-102.

Table 3: Public Comment* Ranking for Cherry Creek and Chatfield State Park Dog Training Areas

Comment Description	Comment Type	Number of Comments	Percentage of Total Comments	Ranking
Keep dog park open to all users	Suggestion	757	72.4%	1
Keep dogs off-leash	Suggestion	655	62.7%	2
Feels that people don't clean up after their dogs.	Issue	194	18.6%	3
Purchases annual pass specifically to use dog park	Comment	173	16.6%	4
Supports segregating users (dog/horse/bicyclists)	Comment	173	16.6%	4
Supports additional trash cans and dog waste bag dispensers	Comment	149	14.3%	5
Access to water play areas	Issue	147	14.1%	6
Other suggestion about enforcing rules	Suggestion	141	13.5%	7
Keep park open to equestrian use	Suggestion	140	13.4%	8
Limited or No conflicts observed	Issue	126	12.1%	9
Supports increasing fees on users to pay for maintenance.	Suggestion	125	12.0%	10
Enforce rules through a Ranger/ fines	Suggestion	105	10.0%	11
Feels there are few or no other off-leash dog parks in Metro Denver	Issue	77	7.4%	12
Lack of owner control over dog	Issue	77	7.4%	12
Increase size or add additional off-leash areas	Suggestion	76	7.3%	13
Supports rotating sections of park to restore landscape	Comment	74	7.1%	14
Dog/horse conflicts	Issue	72	6.9%	15
No significant impact on wildlife and vegetation	Issue	70	6.7%	16
Overcrowded	Issue	65	6.2%	17
Significant damage to wildlife and vegetation	Issue	63	6.0%	18
Dog/human conflicts	Issue	42	4.0%	19
Keep dog park open for dog training purposes only	Suggestion	42	4.0%	19
Enforce rules through additional signage	Suggestion	42	4.0%	19
Supports a monthly/annual clean-up day	Comment	36	3.4%	20
Dog/bicycle conflicts	Issue	33	3.2%	21
Suggests more enclosures/ fenced-in boundaries	Suggestion	31	3.0%	22
Restrict or monitor outside access	Comment	29	2.8%	23
Suggestion regarding dog waste.	Suggestion	27	2.6%	24
No significant impact on soil and water quality	Issue	27	2.6%	24
Suggests more public education	Suggestion	26	2.5%	25
Supports more pet-friendly facilities, improvements, or amenities	Comment	25	2.4%	26
Keep dogs on leash	Suggestion	25	2.4%	26
Disapproves of horse owners not cleaning up after their horses.	Issue	19	1.8%	27
Dog on dog altercations	Issue	19	1.8%	27
Other conflict	Issue	18	1.7%	28
Limit number of dogs per person	Suggestion	14	1.3%	29
Litter	Issue	13	1.2%	30
Dogs disturb wildlife	Issue	10	1.0%	31
Increased traffic and parking volume	Issue	9	0.9%	32
Opposes rotating sections of park to restore landscape	Comment	8	0.8%	33
Maintain current size of dog park	Suggestion	6	0.6%	34

* "Comments" are defined as emails, written documents, or open house comment cards.

Figure 1: Top Ten Issues Cited by the Public about the Chatfield and Cherry Creek State Park DTAs



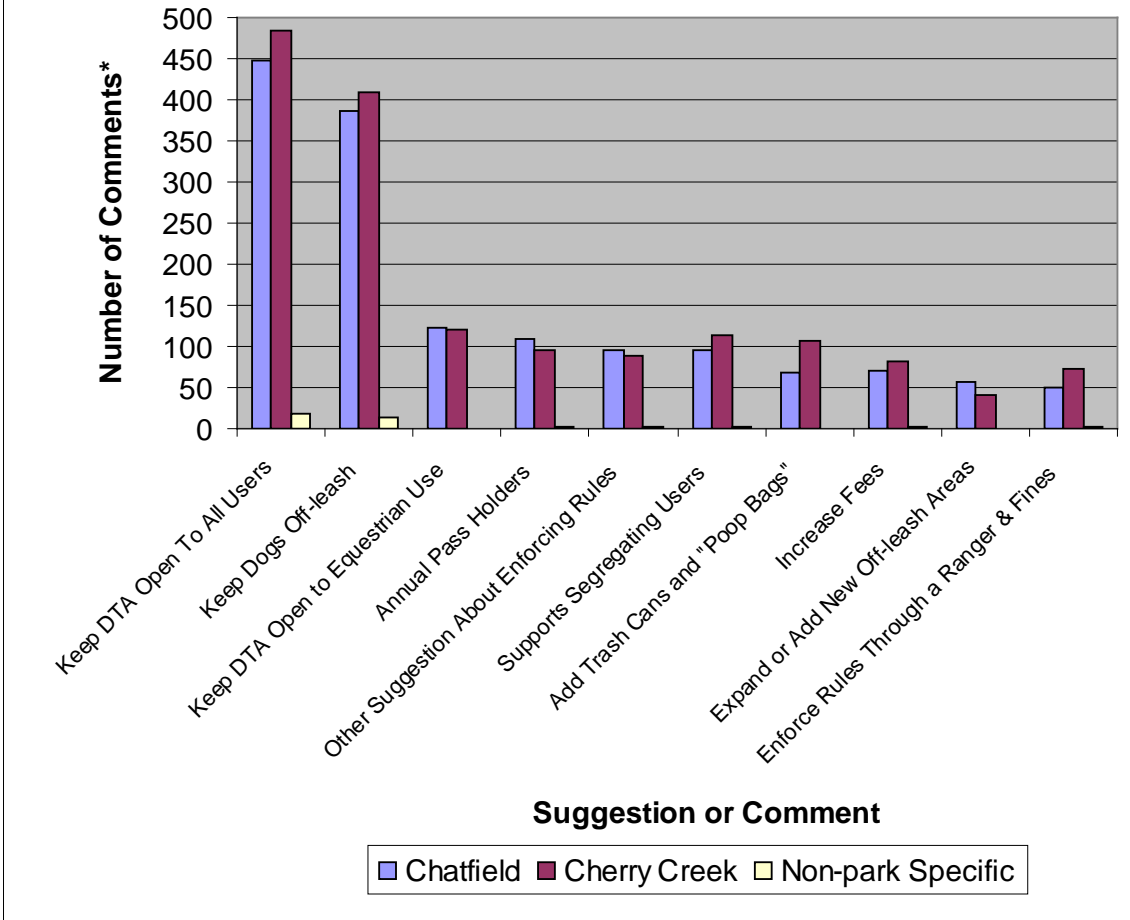
* “Comments” are defined as emails, written documents, or open house comment cards.

Table 4: Top Ten Issues Cited by the Public about the Chatfield and Cherry Creek State Park DTAs

Issue	Number of Comments*		
	Chatfield	Cherry Creek	Non-park Specific
Dog Waste	104	125	1
Water Access	103	77	3
Limited User Conflicts	72	69	3
Lack of Metro Denver Off-Leash Areas	58	44	0
Minimal Environmental Impact	49	34	0
Dog/horse Conflicts	12	69	0
Lack of Owner Control Over Dog	44	58	2
Overcrowded	36	47	0
Significant Environmental Impact	29	48	1
Dog/Human Conflicts	27	27	0

* “Comments” are defined as emails, written documents, or open house comment cards.

Figure 2: Top Ten Suggestions or Comments Cited by the Public about the Chatfield and Cherry Creek State Park DTAs



* "Comments" are defined as emails, written documents, or open house comment cards.

Table 5: Top Ten Suggestions or Comments Cited by the Public about the Chatfield and Cherry Creek State Park DTAs

	Number of Comments*		
	Chatfield	Cherry Creek	Non-park Specific
Keep DTA Open To All Users	447	485	19
Keep Dogs Off-leash	387	409	13
Keep DTA Open to Equestrian Use	123	120	0
Annual Pass Holders	108	95	2
Other Suggestion About Enforcing Rules	96	88	3
Supports Segregating Users	95	113	3
Add Trash Cans and "Poop Bags"	68	106	0
Increase Fees	71	81	3
Expand or Add New Off-leash Areas	57	42	1
Enforce Rules Through a Ranger & Fines	51	72	2

* "Comments" are defined as emails, written documents, or open house comment cards.

Details by Comment Category

Use of Dog Training Area

Almost three out of four commenters desired the off-leash area to remain open for all users. Only four percent of commenters wished to see the DTAs managed for their original purpose as a sport dog training area only. Commenters strongly agreed that State Parks should accommodate all users who wish to utilize the off-leash area for recreational purposes. State Parks could seek balance and mitigate conflicts between user groups in a variety of ways, according to the public:

- Segregate users (16.6%)⁴
- Expand or create additional off-leash areas (7.3%)⁵
- Erect fencing or barriers (3%)
- Limit the number of dogs per person, per visit (1.3%)
- Designate and alternate days/time for different users
- Relocate the Paint Horse Stables at Cherry Creek

On-leash/Off-leash Policy

Perhaps the most desirable aspect of the DTAs is their unmatched size and popularity as an off-leash area. The public adamantly supported maintaining the off-leash policy at the DTAs, capturing about two-thirds of comments, versus the small minority (<3% of total comments) in favor of enforcing on-leash rules. For many, keeping the area an off-leash space is a “make or break” factor determining their future use of the DTAs. While a select few felt that loose dogs are a hazard to people and other animals, time has shown that the off-leash policy produced limited conflicts over the years, as discussed in the following section.

User Conflicts

Twelve percent of comments, more than any other ‘user conflict’ category, observed limited or no conflicts between users at the DTAs. If conflicts were observed, the most common to least common user conflicts were:

- 1) dog/horse (6.9%)
- 2) dog/human (4%)
- 3) dog/bicycle (3.2%)
- 4) dog on dog altercations (1.8%), and
- 5) other conflicts (1.7%).

Each of these conflicts are explained in more detail in the following sections.

Dogs and Horses

The majority of comments related to user conflicts corresponded to user conflicts between dogs and horses (6.9%). One commenter summed up the root of the conflict this way, “The problem is that most of the dogs out there have not been around horses and the dog owners don’t have control over their dog. Some dogs are curious and others become aggressive towards horses.” Another

⁴ The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation is authorized under Colorado State Law, Title 33-1-117 to make use of Pittman-Robertson Act funding for the purposes outlined in the act, which includes establishing cooperative wildlife restoration and hunter education projects. Using this authority, it is possible that a newly created hunting dog training area could be funded partially or wholly using P-R funds, in conjunction with the Division of Wildlife.

⁵ A small group specifically mentioned that they would like to see the 2006 DTA Moratorium lifted in order to expand or create new off-leash areas in State Parks.

commenter lamented, “The horse has the right-of-way because a 200 pound person is attempting to control a 1000 pound animal that sees dogs as a predator, not as a friend.” According to public feedback, conflicts between horses and dogs are rare, but when they do occur it “makes things difficult for everyone”.

Conflicts between dogs and horses appear to be exacerbated at Cherry Creek due to the close proximity of the Paint Horse Stables next to the off-leash area. In fact, long-time users of Cherry Creek State Park wrote that conflicts between dogs and horses were practically non-existent before the stables relocated to their current location. Other dog owners cited problems with the stable’s operator.

While a few suggested limiting horseback riding to certain days at the park, or requiring horses to wear bells to alert dog walkers of their presence, the majority of commenters thought the best solution was simply to segregate dogs and horses altogether. In the comments, the public wished to see fences erected separating the off-leash area from horse trails, clearly marked signs denoting trail usage, or simply moving the horse stable at Cherry Creek to another location in the park.

Dogs and Humans

The second most common user conflict (4%) reported ia between dogs and the elderly, children, fisherman, and birdwatchers. The root of the problem, according to the public, is irresponsible dog owners who lack control over their dog’s aggressive behavior (7.4%).

One particular incident between Senator Nancy Spence’s daughter and a recreational dog walker demonstrates this conflict well. Cherry Creek Park Ranger Myra Pacheco explained,

“On 7-26-09, I was waved down by a woman named Christy who had a dog jump at her showing his teeth. The occurrence was at the creek in the 12-mile south [...] Christy added the dog owner screamed at her to remove the wide-brimmed hat she was wearing because, ‘It was making her dog angry.’ I apologized to her for being frightened by the dog.”

Incidents like this appear to be rare, but not uncommon. Solutions offered by the public to mitigate conflicts between aggressive or poorly-trained dogs and humans included:

- Implementing a similar voice and sight dog tag program to that in the City of Boulder. To participate in the program, owners must watch a video about voice and sight control, register and pay a fee with the City of Boulder, and display the tags on their animals. For more information refer to the City of Boulder’s website: http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5562&Itemid=411
- Requiring all dog owners to present an AKC Canine Good Citizen Certificate. To earn the certificate, owners and their pets must pass a 10 step test proving basic good dog manners and responsible pet ownership. For more information refer to the American Kennel Club’s website: <http://www.akc.org/events/cgc/program.cfm>
- Ticketing owners or removing aggressive dogs from the off-leash area.
- Organizing volunteers to monitor off-leash area during peak usage (evenings and weekends).
- Prohibiting children from entering off-leash area

- Limiting the number of persons in the off-leash area to avoid overcrowding and decrease the chance for a dog/human conflict
- Offering dog etiquette classes at the park or requiring users to show proof of good behavior and current immunizations.

Dogs and Bicycles

Almost four percent of comments concerned conflicts between dogs and bicyclists. One comment sums up the general sentiment, “There are so many [bicyclists] on the public roads that it is difficult to drive through the Park and often feels unsafe [...] So much money [is] spent for and consideration extended to a group that doesn’t even pay to use the Park.” Conflicts between dogs and bicyclists appeared to be more common at Chatfield State Park, than Cherry Creek. Suggestions to ameliorate conflicts between dogs and bicycles included: requiring bicyclists to pay a small fee for using the park and rerouting bike trails off roads and walking paths to avoid high-speed collisions with dogs, cars, and people.

Dog on Dog Altercations

Less than 12 percent of commenters observed a slight “scuttle” between dogs, but attributed the dogs’ behavior to canine socialization. A handful of commenters (1.8%) reported serious incidents of dog on dog conflict that required veterinarian attention.

Other conflicts

This category included conflicts between other user groups in the park (1.7%). Some examples included conflicts between horses and humans or bicyclists, human to human conflict, or model airplanes.

The most common solution cited to mitigate the problem of user conflicts was to segregate dogs, bicyclists, and horses altogether (16.6%).

Etiquette and Rule Enforcement

The free-for-all nature of the off-leash areas contribute to both the success as well as numerous issues at the DTAs. In general, most commenters felt that additional rules and enforcement are needed at the DTAs, but too many rules would discourage users from visiting the park. Ten percent of commenters suggested increasing the number of rangers patrolling the DTAs, issuing fines to owners for not picking up dog waste, and removing overly-aggressive dogs from the park. Four percent want to see Parks post the rules in large print on additional, clearly marked signs in strategic locations around the DTA. Commenters also suggested increasing public education or awareness about park rules through brochures, flyers, and dog etiquette courses.

Animal Waste and Garbage

Over 40 percent of comments dealt with animal waste or garbage in some respect.⁶ Dog fecal waste was the number one issue cited by commenters for both parks ($\approx 18\%$). Commenters emphasized that the majority of dog owners do pick up after their dogs, but bemoaned the select few dog owners who are apathetic to their dog’s waste or lazy because of a lack of trash cans in the DTAs. Users

⁶ Effective 5/30/2006, the Code of Colorado Regulations states that “...any handler of any dog to fail to immediately collect, remove, and properly dispose of all dog or pet feces from, or near, any developed park sites including campgrounds, picnic area, dog training areas, and designated trails.”

with more than one dog, such as a professional dog walker, also have a more difficult time cleaning up after all dogs in their charge. More commenters complained about dog waste at Cherry Creek (8.5%) than Chatfield (6.5%). Waste is particularly a problem near bodies of water. A small number of comments (1.8%) referred to the problem of horse manure and urine at Cherry Creek.

The public recommended seven actions Parks could take to better manage the problem of dog waste in the DTAs:

- 1) The most common solution cited in the comments was to offer additional trash cans and “poop bag” dispensers throughout the DTA. Commenters want to see trash cans spread out throughout the off-leash area, not just near the entrance or parking lots. Trash cans near water are desirable. Commenters suggested organizing volunteers to empty trash receptacles or place local advertisements on cans and dispensers to help cover the cost of maintaining them.
- 2) Cut or manage the weeds, especially thistles, in the DTA that make it difficult for dog owners to follow and clean up after their pets.
- 3) Organize a group of volunteers to pick up waste on a continual basis. Contact dog magazines, listservs, local pet supply companies, vet offices, shelters, and all who submitted comments during the public comment period etc. to recruit and communicate with volunteers.
- 4) Bring in work crews who need to complete community service hours to clean up dog waste.
- 5) Initiate a public education campaign that encourages users to pick up their waste and others too if they see any. Offer free “poop bags” as an incentive.
- 6) Participate in the EnviroWagg Composting program being utilized in a couple cities around metro Denver. The program composts dog waste into a safe and nutrient rich soil amendment. EnviroWagg, LLC organizes and implements the composting operation. For more information, refer to EnviroWagg, LLC’s website: <http://envirowagg.com/>
- 7) Three percent of comments supported an annual or monthly volunteer clean-up day. Commenters suggested partnering with local businesses to sponsor the clean-up event with food, drinks, and even gift certificates in exchange for volunteers’ assistance.

Fees and Revenue

Almost 30 percent of comments received mentioned an issue or comment related to fees. Twelve percent of comments supported increasing user fees for both parks and 16 percent of commenters purchase annual passes specifically to use the dog training area.

While comments about purchasing annual passes are relatively straight forward, commenters described concerns and suggestions about a fee increase in more detail. Below are some general areas of concern expressed by the public:

- 1) How much to charge: Commenters suggested increasing fees anywhere from \$.50 to \$50.00. The majority of commenters, however, specified an increase in the mid \$10-20 range.
- 2) Fee type: Comments were evenly split in support of either a 1) sticker or tag that attaches to the owner, dog, or owner’s vehicle to show receipt of payment or 2) a special annual pass, additional “pass”, or punch card for DTA users that costs more than a regular annual pass.

- 3) The “who” and “when”, related to fees: Most commenters agreed a fee increase would apply to all dog training area users. Several, however, suggested Parks mandate an additional or separate fee for sport dog training. Comments varied on how the fee should be applied. Several suggestions included: charging an additional fee per dog; charging an additional fee per day; charging the additional fee through annual passes; or some combination of the three. A select few suggested implementing a temporary fee increase only.

Facilities and Amenities

One out of three commenters supported more pet-friendly facilities and amenities, such as additional fencing, trash cans, access to water play areas. Commenters’ suggestions about DTA improvements usually referred to one of the following six areas:

- 1) Water: Access to quality, water play areas was the second most important issue to the public capturing almost 15 percent of comments. The water bodies at Cherry Creek and Chatfield are valuable and unique assets to the off-leash area, according to the public. There are very few off-leash areas with access to water in the metro Denver area. Sport dog trainers use water for retrieving and recreational dog owners utilize water bodies to exercise their pets or cool them in warm weather. While commenters emphasized the importance of water features in the DTA, they also voiced concerns about erosion along banks, disturbance to waterfowl, water quality issues at Chatfield, and year-round availability of water at Cherry Creek. Two commenters suggested learning about how Washington State Parks and New Mexico State Parks deal with off-leash areas and water access.
- 2) Trash cans and “poop bag” dispensers: Almost 15 percent of commenters supported adding these amenities in various locations around the DTAs. Refer to the section ‘Animal Waste and Garbage’ for more detail.
- 3) Roads and parking: Pave entrances and parking areas at Cherry Creek; install an emergency phone at each parking lot; separate entrances/exits in parking lots.
- 4) Trail amenities: Place more benches along trails and near water bodies for the elderly and disabled; build steps leading into water to avoid erosion along banks.
- 5) Restrooms: Upgrade improved year-round facilities; one commenter suggested adding compost toilets.
- 6) Fences: Commenters suggested installing fences for several reasons-- to mark a clear boundary for the off-leash area, preventing dogs from running into the road, parking lots, or environmentally-sensitive areas of the park; use fences to segregate users, particularly dogs from horses.

Natural Environment

About 10 percent of commenters felt there were no adverse effects to wildlife, vegetation, and soil or water quality at the DTAs. Many cited the findings from *The Effects of Off-Leash Dog Areas on Birds and Small Mammals in Cherry Creek and Chatfield State Parks* (Ensign Technical Services, Inc., June 2008), *The Influence of Pet Recreation Areas on Soil and Water Quality at Chatfield State Park* (GEI Consultants, September 2008) and *The Influence of Pet Recreation Areas on Soil and Water Quality at Cherry Creek State Park* (GEI Consultants, September 2008) as inconclusive evidence of environmental degradation at the DTAs. Commenters emphasized that dogs were not the *main* contributors to environmental

degradation at the DTAs; instead human, horses, bicycles and cars also play a significant role in degrading the natural environment at the off-leash areas. Commenters acknowledged some environmental degradation and encouraged State Parks to find solutions to mediate the damage, but did not approve of restoration efforts at the expense of disallowing off-leash recreation opportunities. The primary purpose of the DTAs is off-leash recreation, not conservation, according to the majority of the public.

Fewer commenters (6%) felt the current use of the DTA *was* doing significant damage to the natural environment. The main issue cited included: water contamination from fecal waste and garbage; erosion due to a high volume of “foot/paw/hoof/tire” traffic; loss of vegetation; declines in bird and small mammal populations; and proliferation of noxious weeds. Users who have frequented the park for over a decade mentioned a noticeable decline in the natural environment over this time period.

Several substantive comments related to dogs disturbing wildlife included:

- “Many, many times I have observed dogs swerving off the dog road at the south end of the beaver pond [at Chatfield] and splashing into the pond and flushing the shorebirds and other waterfowl feeding on the mudflats.”
- “I would prefer [to] see that Park officials do whatever is necessary to help bring back wildlife to the dog park area. The dogs and constant traffic has forced most of the deer to other parts of the park. The area was much more natural when years ago it was used for dog training only.”
- Less than one percent of commenters mentioned dogs specifically disturb wildlife.
- Rangers should monitor and impose fines for dogs who disturb wildlife.
- State Parks should uphold Title 33-6-128, which prohibits the harassment of wildlife whether the instigator be human or canine.



“Dogs are no more damaging to the environment than vehicles, including bicycles, and boats polluting water. It is primarily a matter of overuse by all populations.”
-Bonnie Macdonald

Seven percent of commenters expressed direct support for rotating sections of the park to restore the landscape, as opposed to less than one percent who opposed rotating sections of the landscape. Other suggestions about mitigating negative effects to the natural environment included: implementing erosion control measures, particularly along water bodies; regularly checking water quality and posting results in a highly visible location; removing noxious weeds; use permeable paving or rubber mats along trails.

Volunteering

At least ten percent of comments received expressed an interest in volunteering. As one commenter put it, “[Build] a community of dog owners who foster the desired culture and ‘petiquette’ (self policing, watching children, cleaning up waste, donate time to cleaning up the park, etc.)” Establishing a volunteer corps to assist Park Managers with these tasks as well as weed control, trail maintenance, patrolling, and developing dog training courses at the dog park are a few of the ways commenters volunteered to help. Organizing a DTA citizen advisory committee is another option supported by the public. Planning staff is able to generate a list of volunteer names and contact information if Parks wishes to pursue volunteer assistance at the DTAs.

CHERRY CREEK STATE PARK DOG TRAINING AREA

Key Findings

- Colorado State Parks received *650 open house comment cards, emails, and written documents* about the Cherry Creek Dog Training Area during the public comment period.
- Colorado State Parks Planning staff documented *2,543 individual comments* from the total documents received (650) about the Cherry Creek Dog Training Area during the public comment period.
- Planning Staff estimates around *565 people* submitted comments about Cherry Creek’s Dog Training Area.⁷
- Conflicts between dogs and horses was one of the main issues cited by users of Cherry Creek’s off-leash area; 5.7 percent of commenters mentioned dog/horse conflicts at Cherry Creek versus only .3 percent of comments related to Chatfield. Commenters strongly supported rerouting horse trails away from the DTA or relocating the horse stables to another location in the park.
- While Cherry Creek’s DTA has increased in popularity, so have traffic and access issues. Several commenters, who noted they resided near the DTA, complained about users parking and accessing the DTA from the adjacent neighborhood. About two percent of commenters wanted to see improved parking lots and entrances to Cherry Creek’s DTA.
- Environmental issues cited at Cherry Creek included: severe erosion along the banks of the creek, lack of sturdy temporary fencing around landscape restoration areas, the rerouted creek, and lack of a stable, year-round water play area for dogs. Only 1.8 percent were concerned with horse waste and urine contaminating the soil and water at Cherry Creek.
- Top ranked issues, suggestions, and comments for Cherry Creek are listed below in Table 6.

⁷ The number of persons estimated to have submitted comments is less than the overall number of documents received because in many cases, one contact submitted more than one document. This was especially true with open house comment cards and emails. Many who attended the open house filled out a general comment card but also supplemented their comment with an email to State Parks. Staff arrived at the conservative estimate by tabulating total number of contacts assigned to each park (465) and adding an estimated 100 persons more for the anonymous open house comment cards.

Table 6: Public Comment* Ranking for Cherry Creek State Park DTA

Comment Description	Comment Type	Number of Comments	Percentage of Total Comments	Ranking
Keep dog park open to all users	Suggestion	485	46.4%	1
Keep dogs off-leash	Suggestion	409	39.1%	2
Feels that people don't clean up after their dogs.	Issue	125	12.0%	3
Keep park open to equestrian use	Suggestion	120	11.5%	4
Supports segregating users (dog/horse/bicyclists)	Comment	113	10.8%	5
Supports additional trash cans and dog waste bag dispensers	Comment	106	10.1%	6
Purchases annual pass specifically to use dog park	Comment	95	9.1%	7
Other suggestion about enforcing rules	Suggestion	88	8.4%	8
Supports increasing fees on users to pay for maintenance.	Suggestion	81	7.8%	9
Access to water play areas	Issue	77	7.4%	10
Enforce rules through a Ranger/ fines	Suggestion	72	6.9%	11
Dog/horse conflicts	Issue	69	6.6%	12
Limited or No conflicts observed	Issue	69	6.6%	12
Lack of owner control over dog	Issue	58	5.6%	13
Significant damage to wildlife and vegetation	Issue	48	4.6%	14
Overcrowded	Issue	47	4.5%	15
Supports rotating sections of park to restore landscape	Comment	46	4.4%	16
Feels there are few or no other off-leash dog parks in Metro Denver	Issue	44	4.2%	17
Increase size or add additional off-leash areas	Suggestion	42	4.0%	18
No significant impact on wildlife and vegetation	Issue	34	3.3%	19
Keep dog park open for dog training purposes only	Suggestion	31	3.0%	20
Suggests more enclosures/ fenced-in boundaries	Suggestion	28	2.7%	21
Dog/human conflicts	Issue	27	2.6%	22
Enforce rules through additional signage	Suggestion	25	2.4%	23
Suggests more public education	Suggestion	21	2.0%	24
Keep dogs on leash	Suggestion	19	1.8%	25
Supports more pet-friendly facilities, improvements, or amenities	Comment	18	1.7%	26
Supports a monthly/annual clean-up day	Comment	16	1.5%	27
Disapproves of horse owners not cleaning up after their horses.	Issue	16	1.5%	27
Other conflict	Issue	14	1.3%	28
Restrict or monitor outside access	Comment	14	1.3%	28
Suggestion regarding dog waste.	Suggestion	13	1.2%	29
Dog/bicycle conflicts	Issue	13	1.2%	29
No significant impact on soil and water quality	Issue	12	1.1%	30
Dog on dog altercations	Issue	12	1.1%	30
Litter	Issue	9	0.9%	31
Dogs disturb wildlife	Issue	8	0.8%	32
Increased traffic and parking volume	Issue	8	0.8%	32
Limit number of dogs per person	Suggestion	7	0.7%	33
Maintain current size of dog park	Suggestion	4	0.4%	34

* "Comments" are defined as emails, written documents, or open house comment cards.

Email and Written Comments v. Open House Comment Cards

Cherry Creek State Park received a total of 420 *email and written documents*, providing 1,608 *individually coded issues, suggestions, and comments*.

Cherry Creek State Park received a total of 230 *open house comment cards*, providing an additional 776 *individually coded issues, suggestions, and comments*.

Overall, commenters consistently ranked their top issues and suggestions regardless of the type of document submitted (email, written document, or open house comment card). Similar themes emerged through each document type, such as keeping the DTA open to all users as an off-leash area, access to key amenities, the problem of dog waste, and minimal impacts to the environment. One key difference between email/written documents and open house comment cards was the high volume of emails received from the equestrian community after the open house took place.

CHATFIELD STATE PARK DOG TRAINING AREA

Key Findings

- Colorado State Parks received 611 *open house comment cards, emails, and written documents* about the Chatfield Dog Training Area during the public comment period.
- Colorado State Parks Planning staff documented 2,360 *individual comments* from the total documents received (611) about the Chatfield Dog Training Area during the public comment period.
- Planning Staff estimates around 549 *people* submitted comments about Chatfield's Dog Training Area.⁸
- Conflicts between dogs, humans, and bicyclists were more of an issue at Chatfield than conflicts between dogs and horses. Commenters took issue with bicyclists being allowed in and around the DTA, complaining of high speed collisions and chases. Commenters also complained about the free access to the DTA from C-470 and suggested all users should have to pay to use Chatfield's facilities.
- The nature of environmental concerns about Chatfield differed slightly from concerns about Cherry Creek. While commenters at Cherry Creek felt water quantity and availability was an issue, Chatfield commenters voiced concerns about water quality. Several felt the ponds were "dirty" or "gross" and suggested offering a cleaner, healthier water supply.
- Almost three percent of commenters supported rotating sections of the landscape to restore vegetation and combat erosion; less than one percent opposed this action. Cherry Creek only had supportive comments for restoring the landscape (3.3%).

⁸ One person may have submitted more than one document, which is why there are fewer people than documents. Staff arrived at the estimate by tabulating total number of contacts assigned to each park (449) and adding an estimated 100 persons more for the anonymous open house comment cards.

- Top ranked issues, suggestions, and comments for Chatfield are listed below in Table 7.

Comment Description	Comment Type	Number of Comments	Percentage of Total Comments	Ranking
Keep dog park open to all users	Suggestion	447	42.8%	1
Keep dogs off-leash	Suggestion	387	37.0%	2
Keep park open to equestrian use	Suggestion	123	11.8%	3
Purchases annual pass specifically to use dog park	Comment	108	10.3%	4
Feels that people don't clean up after their dogs.	Issue	104	10.0%	5
Access to water play areas	Issue	103	9.9%	6
Other suggestion about enforcing rules	Suggestion	96	9.2%	7
Supports segregating users (dog/horse/bicyclists)	Comment	95	9.1%	8
Limited or No conflicts observed	Issue	72	6.9%	9
Supports increasing fees on users to pay for maintenance.	Suggestion	71	6.8%	10
Supports additional trash cans and dog waste bag dispensers	Comment	68	6.5%	11
Feels there are few or no other off-leash dog parks in Metro Denver	Issue	58	5.6%	12
Increase size or add additional off-leash areas	Suggestion	57	5.5%	13
Enforce rules through a Ranger/ fines	Suggestion	51	4.9%	14
No significant impact on wildlife and vegetation	Issue	49	4.7%	15
Lack of owner control over dog	Issue	44	4.2%	16
Supports rotating sections of park to restore landscape	Comment	40	3.8%	17
Keep dog park open for dog training purposes only	Suggestion	39	3.7%	18
Overcrowded	Issue	36	3.4%	19
Significant damage to wildlife and vegetation	Issue	29	2.8%	20
Dog/human conflicts	Issue	27	2.6%	21
Supports a monthly/annual clean-up day	Comment	26	2.5%	22
Enforce rules through additional signage	Suggestion	26	2.5%	22
Dog/bicycle conflicts	Issue	25	2.4%	23
Keep dogs on leash	Suggestion	19	1.8%	24
Restrict or monitor outside access	Comment	18	1.7%	25
Suggestion regarding dog waste.	Suggestion	17	1.6%	26
No significant impact on soil and water quality	Issue	17	1.6%	26
Suggests more public education	Suggestion	15	1.4%	27
Other conflict	Issue	14	1.3%	28
Dog/horse conflicts	Issue	12	1.1%	29
Limit number of dogs per person	Suggestion	11	1.1%	30
Supports more pet-friendly facilities, improvements, or amenities	Comment	10	1.0%	31
Suggests more enclosures/ fenced-in boundaries	Suggestion	10	1.0%	31
Dog on dog altercations	Issue	10	1.0%	31
Opposes rotating sections of park to restore landscape	Comment	8	0.8%	32
Litter	Issue	7	0.7%	33
Dogs disturb wildlife	Issue	4	0.4%	34
Maintain current size of dog park	Suggestion	4	0.4%	34
Disapproves of horse owners not cleaning up after their horses.	Issue	2	0.2%	35
Increased traffic and parking volume	Issue	1	0.1%	36

* "Comments" are defined as emails, written documents, or open house comment cards.

Email and Written Comments v. Open House Comment Cards

Chatfield State Park received a total of 404 *email and written documents*, providing 1542 *individually coded issues, suggestions, and comments*.

Chatfield State Park received a total of 207 *open house comment cards*, providing an additional 707 *individually coded issues, suggestions, and comments*.

Overall, commenters consistently ranked their top issues and suggestions regardless of the type of document submitted (email, written document, or open house comment card). Similar themes emerged through each document type, such as keeping the DTA open to all users as an off-leash area, access to key amenities, the problem of dog waste, and minimal impacts to the environment. One key difference between email/written documents and open house comment cards was the high volume of emails received from the equestrian community after the open house took place.

CONCLUSION

This report took 1,045 substantive public comments in the form of emails, written letters, and comment cards, and organized issues and suggestions to provide useful feedback for future management decisions at the DTAs. Highlights included:

- About three out of four commenters desire the off-leash area to remain open for all users and to develop management solutions that will accommodate the needs of all users.
- The number one issue of concern for the public at the DTAs is excessive dog waste. The most commonly cited solution for this problem was placing additional trash cans and “poop bag” dispensers at various locations in the DTAs.
- Conflicts between dogs and horses were the most commonly cited type of user conflict, particularly at Cherry Creek State Park. Conflicts between dogs, humans, and bicyclists were cited as more of an issue at Chatfield State Park.
- The most common solution cited to mitigate user conflicts was to segregate dogs, bicyclists, and horses to separate areas of the parks (16.6% of total comments).
- Ten percent of commenters want to see more rangers patrolling the DTAs, issuing fines to users who do not pick up after their dog, and removing “aggressive” dogs from the DTA.
- About 10 percent of commenters felt there were no adverse effects to wildlife, vegetation, and soil or water quality at the DTAs. Seven percent supported rotating sections of the DTA to help restore the landscape.
- 12 percent of commenters would support a fee increase to use the DTAs.
- About 10% of commenters expressed a strong interest in volunteering to help manage, maintain, or enforce rules at the dog training area.

As State Parks moves forward with addressing issues and incorporating public feedback from this report, it is important to recognize that the public has expressed strong appreciation for the DTAs. The purpose of the off-leash areas clearly extends beyond just exercising dogs, but also provides opportunities for companionship, increased health benefits, and according to some, builds safer communities. To conclude this report, the following story from one comment highlights the important role the DTA played in the life of one person:

“I was walking my dog on a cold gray day and we were playing along the creek. We headed to what we think of as “the beach” where a large water/sand area is perfect for fetch and splash, when an elderly lady and her [two] companions approached. She was dressed in her Sunday best and determinedly made her slow way to the beach. At the waters edge, she pulled a packet of ashes from her purse and paused to say a prayer. All of us on the beach stopped, even the dogs it seemed. She [said] a prayer and released the ashes into the stream where it bends to the wilder branches of the wetlands. Her beloved pet, she said, had always loved this beach the best. At 81 she didn’t think she would have another dog, but this one had kept her alive and in the world. He would be missed.”