



## PRESS RELEASE

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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### **Dogs and Nature Preserves: Compromise Needed!**

By the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association  
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Part of the joy of having a dog is taking them with us on walks: we all benefit from the exercise, time together, and viewing nature. We also love to go walking in nature preserves and conservation areas to do the same. Unfortunately, park managers have seen a marked increase in people refusing to leash their dogs and an increase in reactive animals. The impacts on wildlife, visitor experience, and the ecology is hard to calculate, but there is concern about this issue: serious enough that policy changes may prohibit dogs from being in the preserves at all, which hurts everyone. For now, in trying to balance the interests of dog lovers and nature lovers, nature preserves that do allow dogs on the trails require that you keep the dogs *on a leash only* and clean up after them.

Nature preserves and conservation sites are just that: safe places for wildlife and plants to grow and reproduce safely. Sadly, with humans encroaching on wildlife areas as our population grows, there are less places for them to do it and there is a great need for conservation areas. Dogs running off leash can disturb the ecology of the preserve, frightening wildlife, crushing delicate plants off trail, and negatively impact visitor experience. Not everyone appreciates your dog chasing after them as they walk, even if the dog is merely curious. Also, not everyone is physically equipped to handle an interaction with a dog. Older people, pregnant women, and people with physical ailments would love to enjoy nature with-out fearing an exuberant, jumping dog.

Leashing your dog has a lot of benefits to you, too. It will keep your dog safe from any unwanted wildlife encounters (think porcupines and skunks). It will help prevent dog fights: even if your dog is friendly, not everyone's dog is, and fights can break out between dogs with people getting injured. If your dog sees a deer or other wildlife and chases it, they may ignore your frantic calls and get lost.

The sad fact is that park managers at the state and local level are increasingly reluctant to allow dogs in at all because of some dog owners who refuse to leash their dogs and who threaten them, tear down signs, and ignore the park rules. They are considering new policies that may prohibit dogs on the premises. But because they love dogs (most are dog

owners, too), they are imploring visitors at nature preserves to respect nature and keep their dogs on a leash and clean up after them. It is a fair compromise: You and your leashed dog can enjoy the preserve, and the wildlife and other visitors are not disturbed.

We are not advocating you avoid conservation areas with your dog. We are asking that you keep your dog on a leash and pick up after them as a matter of health, safety, and environmental protection. Failure to do so may result in policy changes that don't allow them in the parks at all- then we all lose.

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*The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 380 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.*