

New Dog Leash Regulations in Effect for Wildlife Management Areas

Written by Kathy Herz, Editor

Dog walkers at state wildlife management areas (WMAs) will soon be seeing signs posted at parking areas and along trails informing them of a new regulation regarding leash requirements. The regulation reads: **"Dogs must be on a leash no longer than seven (7) feet and under the control of their owner or keeper. The person responsible for the dog must hold the leash at all times. The provisions of this subsection shall not apply to the proper use of dogs while in the act of hunting or the training of dogs for the specific purpose of hunting, however all dogs may be prohibited on any area or during any time period when so posted by the Department."** This new regulation enables DEP Environmental Conservation Police Officers to enforce the leash requirements by issuing tickets to anyone who allows their dog to roam off the leash at state wildlife management areas (state parks and state forests already have leash laws in effect). The only exception will be during the fall hunting season when unleashed dogs can be used in the act of hunting, but only if they are under the control of the hunter.

Why the New Regulation?

There are probably going to be a lot of unhappy dog owners once the new signs go up and particularly when some people are issued a ticket. However, there are many important reasons why this regulation had to be put into place.

Wildlife management areas have been set aside primarily for the conservation of wildlife populations and their habitat. Public use of these areas is a benefit, but not the main reason for their existence.

From a wildlife managers perspective, dogs should not be allowed to run free on property that has been set aside specifically for the conservation of wildlife. Free-roaming dogs do not stay on the trail like their owners, but wander off into the surrounding forests, fields, and wetlands.

There is no doubt about it, and there is scientific evidence to support it - dogs are a threat and a disturbance to wildlife, even when restrained on a leash. During a study conducted in Australia, researchers found that "dog walking led to a 35% reduction in the number of bird species and a 41% reduction in overall bird num-

bers" compared to results found in areas where no one, both dogs and people, had recently walked. (It was also found that people walking along trails caused some disturbance, but less than half that caused by people walking dogs.)

Dogs are perceived by wildlife as predators. Ground nesting birds are heavily distressed by dogs and may abandon or lose their nests if constantly disturbed. They also are susceptible to undue stress and may suffer injuries from unleashed dogs. Many populations of ground nesting birds, which nest at WMAs, are in long-term decline on a regional basis. Dogs also will chase wildlife, including their helpless offspring.

Owners often allow their dogs to swim in wetland areas at WMAs, such as streams, ponds, marshes, and vernal pools. Waterfowl and waterbirds (i.e., herons) that use these areas are usually frightened away from their nests. Dogs wading through vernal pools and marshes have a negative impact on these important amphibian breeding sites. Egg masses left behind by wood frogs, spring peepers, and various species of salamanders can be destroyed. In addition, the pathways that dogs and their owners have created to gain access to these wetlands have destroyed important riparian habitat and caused significant erosion.

Along with the impacts on wildlife, dog walkers who don't follow the leash rules should consider how their free-roaming dogs affect other users of the property. Many people come to WMAs to

hike and enjoy the outdoors and do not appreciate being approached by an unleashed dog. The dog may jump on them and even ruin their "wildlife experience." Some people are afraid of dogs and may feel that they can't go to certain areas if they know dogs are running free. In addition, the dog walkers who do follow the leash rules may not appreciate being approached by an unleashed dog as their dog may feel threatened and there could be conflicts. Also, all dog walkers lose if dogs, leashed or not, are prohibited from specific areas due to the actions of persistent offenders.

State wildlife management areas are public resources that are available for certain outdoor recreational activities. However, there must be rules for everyone to follow so that all uses can coexist and that the main purpose for WMAs can be met - the conservation of wildlife populations and their habitat. It is hoped that all users of WMAs respect these special areas and help conserve them for future generations to enjoy.

Dogs Must Be Leashed at All Times.

- Leashes may not exceed 7 feet in length.
- Leashes must be held at all times.
- Dogs being used by licensed hunters in the act of legal hunting for small game and waterfowl are exempt.



State of Connecticut Regulations Sec. 26-16-1 and Sec. 26-16-3a.

Violators subject to ticketing and fines.



State of Connecticut
Department of Environmental Protection
www.ct.gov/dep

A new regulation requires that all dogs at state wildlife management areas must be on a seven-foot leash that is held by the person responsible for the dog. This leash requirement protects wildlife populations and their habitat.

Hi Anne, Perhaps this is worthy of space in ALT's Newsletter. At least it supports my position (and "No Dogs") at Tuffwood. Best Wishes, Lois