

Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy Dog Policy Action Team Recommendations, March, 2018

Background

The Dane County Parks Division requested recommendations from The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy (FOPBC) regarding the current dog use policy in the County portion of the Pheasant Branch Conservancy. The reasons for the request were prompted by concerns for potential negative impacts on ground nesting bird populations in the Conservancy. The current dog policy allows dogs on a six foot leash on all paths in the County portions of the Conservancy (this is the same policy as most of the City portion except for some narrow trails which don't allow dogs at all).

A Dog Policy Action Team was commissioned by the FOPBC Board. The Team followed inclusive and transparent processes while conducting this work January through March 2018.

The Team:

- Held meetings at Kromrey Middle School.
- Worked with the Restoration and Management Committee to understand the history and current challenges.
- Met with Dane County Parks and City of Middleton staff to get their perspectives.
- Solicited feedback from FOPBC members through a survey
- Obtained input from others such as Madison Audubon, Friends of Middleton Dog Parks.
- Solicited input from other experts in the field (DNR, Bird Conservation Association Members, etc.) and surveyed the literature.

The Team conducted a literature review and considered a number of perspectives on the issue of dogs in the Conservancy and their impact on ground nesting birds. A survey was sent to FOPBC members to obtain input on three possible approaches to managing dogs in the Dane County portion of the Conservancy north of the limestone path. This is considered the prime nesting area. (The survey's introductory information and complete questions and results are attached).

457 surveys were sent out with a total of 166 responses (38% response rate). The results are summarized below.

Policy Options	Support	Neutral	Oppose
No Change in Current Policy	38.6%	15.8%	45.6%
No Dog Access North of Limestone Trail	63.7%	16.6%	19.7%
No Dog Access North of Limestone Trail between Mar. 1 – Oct. 31	44.5%	23.2%	32.3%

Many comments were also provided and are attached with the survey.

Team Recommendations

Based on our research and the results of the survey, the Dog Policy Team believes there is a basis to the concern regarding current dog access and negative impacts on ground nesting bird populations. We further believe that there is support from the FOPBC membership for a revision to the current dog access policy.

The Team recommends:

The FOPBC Board request a change in the dog access policy in the County portion of the Conservancy to: **No dog access allowed north of the main limestone trail. Dogs on static, 6' leashes would still be allowed on all other trails (except as restricted by the City) with enhanced signage, informational campaigns and enforcement efforts.**

Time is of the essence, and the Team requests that the Board review and approve the recommendation at the March Board Meeting and immediately forward this recommendation to the Dane County Parks Division to hopefully implement the policy this spring. Further, the Team feels the following recommendations to be essential in implementing a change to the dog access policy:

1. The new rules only apply to the County-owned section of the Conservancy.
2. To be effective, the policy change will need a substantial public education campaign by the County. The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy is willing to support the County in this effort as appropriate.
3. Enforcement of the policy is the responsibility of the County.
4. Follow-up should be conducted with scientific studies or monitoring to measure the impact of the policy on ground nesting bird populations.