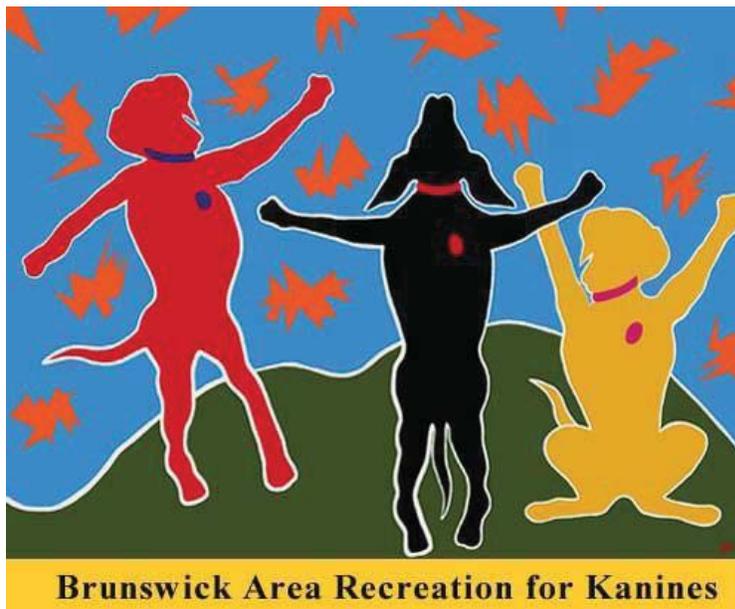


Merrymeeting Dog Park

In Memory of Jake Horgan

USER'S GUIDE



Lab Dance art by Jim Williams

www.facebook.com/BrunswickMaineDogPark



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Introduction

The Merrymeeting Dog Park In Memory of Jake Horgan was made possible by a public/private partnership with Brunswick Area Recreation for Kanines (BARK), People Plus, the Town of Brunswick, the Brunswick Recreation Commission, and many, many members of the surrounding communities. The park opened in June 2013 and is now one of more than 1000 off-leash recreation areas in the country.

The dog park is located along the Androscoggin River Bicycle & Pedestrian Path near the Water Street entrance, just off Mason Street in downtown Brunswick. The park is between the river and US Route 1 and can also be accessed by pedestrians via the Topsham overpass. The park is open one half hour before sunrise till one half hour after sunset with **the parking lot gate on Water Street opened and closed on the same schedule.**

The purpose of this **Merrymeeting Dog Park User's Guide** is to ensure that visits to the dog park are safe and enjoyable for dogs, their owners, and other visitors. The guide provides important information for all users, and should be reviewed before using the park for the first time and occasionally thereafter. The guide:

- *explains the rationale for the rules that are also posted at the park,*
- *offers guidance on how to use the park successfully,*
- *provides information on how to protect your dog's health,*
- *suggests tips for preventing fights, and*
- *offers guidance for responding productively in the event of a fight.*

Thank you for taking the time to review this guide and for abiding by the rules posted at the park.

We hope you and your dog have a WONDERFUL, POSITIVE experience on each and every visit to the park!

Section 1- Dog Park Rules

A list of basic rules has been established for the Merrymeeting Dog Park, and **MUST** be followed by users of the park. The rules have been established to help ensure the safety of EVERYONE -- dogs and people -- using the park.

These dog park rules have been endorsed by the Brunswick Parks and Recreation Department and the Brunswick Animal Control Officer in addition to local trainers and veterinarians. Repeat violations of the rules may result in expulsion from the park.

MERRYMEETING DOG PARK RULES

1. Everyone who enters this dog park does so AT THEIR OWN RISK.

This is true for any recreational area in Maine that is open to the public.

2. Per Maine State Law, dog owners or keepers are solely liable for damages or injuries caused by their dog(s).

If your dog bites someone or jumps and knocks a person down, Maine law holds you responsible for any injury. Although others are equally liable for their dogs' behavior, you are the person responsible for your dog's safety. (For more information, see the sections entitled ***Setting Up Success for Your Dog and Avoiding Good Times Gone Wrong***).

3. Bring no more than three (3) dogs per adult inside the park.

Handlers are responsible for watching their dogs at all times, and it's impossible to closely monitor several dogs at once. In addition, some dogs who live together are prone to "gang up" and bully other dogs.

4. DISPOSE of PET WASTE IMMEDIATELY!

Bags and receptacles are available at both gate entrances. Bring your own just in case. You **MUST** pick up your dog's waste promptly **everywhere** on the Androscoggin River Bicycle & Pedestrian Path, both along the walkway leading to the fenced dog park *and* inside off-leash areas. This is basic to responsible dog ownership, no matter where we are. Children play along the walkway, and dog owners share a responsibility to keep it clean. In the off-leash area, anything we don't pick up, our dogs are likely to wear home—and so may we. The longer piles sit on the ground, the higher the chance that they might transmit intestinal parasites or disease to other dogs. (See the section entitled Veterinary Issues for more information).

Please note that the Brunswick Town Ordinance requires that any person who owns, possesses or controls an animal on the Androscoggin River Bicycle Path remove any feces left by the animal. (Part II, Section 14-143)

5. **Discourage dogs from digging holes. Please refill any holes.**
Digging is part of normal dog play, but holes endanger dogs and humans alike. So please promptly backfill any holes that your dog digs within the park to prevent injury to other dogs or people.
6. **Dogs must be licensed, free of infections, parasites and have ID and rabies tags.**
Maine law requires all dogs to be licensed and vaccinated against rabies. Dogs using public spaces should also be vaccinated against parvovirus, distemper and other diseases as recommended by your veterinarian. Maine law also requires dogs to be licensed by the town their owners reside in. Tags should be with the dog or owner at all times in public spaces. If your dog may have a contagious condition of any sort, please do not put other dogs at risk by coming to the park. (To be aware of other possible health concerns, see section entitled Veterinary Issues).
7. **NO AGGRESSIVE DOGS – dogs displaying aggressive behavior must leave.**
If your dog has a history of aggression or fighting, do not bring him or her to the dog park. Doing so is likely to make your dog's problem worse and cause trauma for others. If your dog is normally peace-loving but is behaving aggressively or hounding another dog who is trying to evade the attention, take him or her out of the park. Fights can change a dog's social outlook for life, and both people and dogs can be seriously injured in them. (For more guidance, see the Section entitled Avoiding Good Times Gone Wrong).
8. **Puppies must have core vaccines and be at least four (4) months old.** Puppies under 4 months do not have mature immune systems, therefore their required vaccines cannot be completed before then.
9. **NO female dogs in heat allowed.**
A female in heat will stimulate fights and leave odors that will agitate other dogs.
10. **Dogs must be on leash when entering and exiting the park gates.**
In addition to dog owners and their dogs, the Androscoggin River Bicycle & Pedestrian Path is used by cyclists, families, soccer players and fans, and walkers/hikers. Before letting your dog out of the car, make sure his collar is snug and your leash is securely attached. Brunswick Town ordinance requires a maximum six (6) foot lead in public areas. (For more information, see the section entitled Sharing the Androscoggin River Bicycle & Pedestrian Path).
11. **Dogs must be collared or harnessed but please remove spike, prong and pinch collars before entering the park.**
Dogs must be free of such collars or halters once they are off leash and inside the park. If this type of a collar or halter catches on a fence or another dog's tooth, it can cause panic and serious injury or death due to strangulation.

12. Please supervise your dog(s) at all times.

The dynamics of dog play can change quickly, and you need to be prepared to intervene quickly.

13. No children under 4 years old allowed; Children under 13 must be with an adult.

Some dogs are uncomfortable around young children and high-pitched voices can trigger predatory behavior. Young children on the ground can also be exposed to feces that may have parasites. Older children should be reminded not to run inside the park as it can arouse predatory behavior, and to always ask owners' permission to approach their dogs. If a fight erupts, they should walk calmly and silently away. It's advisable for people of all ages to wear shoes, rather than sandals or bare feet, in a dog park.

14. No smoking, glass containers or human food. Use caution with dog treats.

Some dogs become aggressive in the presence of food (see the section entitled Resource Guarding). Cigarette butts are toxic to dogs. Do not give treats to anyone else's dog. Some dogs have food allergies, and, again, some will behave aggressively in the presence of food. If you want treats at hand for training purposes, keep them out of sight and don't offer them to any dog but your own. It is best to leave your dog's favorite toy and all rawhide chews at home. Cherished toys and high-value chews, including bully sticks and pigs' ears, also can trigger resource guarding.

15. If your dog seems timid, stressed, overly aroused, or aggressive, please take it out of the off-leash area IMMEDIATELY.

Every day poses different dynamics, even if it's the same group of dogs playing, and a bad day at the dog park can alter a dog's social confidence for life. If your dog becomes irritable or skittish, it's probably time to go home for today. (See the section regarding **Stress Signals** for important information about this).

Note: The small dog area of the dog park can be used by larger dogs as a training or separate play area, provided that there are no small dogs present and there is no "fence fighting" between dogs in the two play areas. Please yield to the owners of dogs less than 25 pounds, if any arrive.

16. You may ask dog owners not observing these rules to leave the park.

If necessary, ask someone else to join you before approaching another park user and politely asking for their cooperation. For extreme or persistent problems with owners or dogs, call Brunswick Animal Control at 725-5521. In the event of an emergency, call 911. Any serious dog bite to a human being should be reported PROMPTLY to the police.

Section 2 - Sharing the Bike/Pedestrian Path

Like many other off-leash recreation areas nationwide, the Merrymeeting Dog Park is situated in a multi-use public park complex. All dogs must be on leash when arriving and leaving the dog park.

The Androscoggin River Bicycle & Pedestrian Path is used:

- *By cyclists year-round;*
- *By hikers and walkers year-round;*
- *B youth soccer teams in the spring and summer and fall;*
- *By the families of soccer players;*
- *By dog owners with leashed dogs year-round.*

If you come to the dog park during peak usage times, you may need to negotiate busy sidewalks. **Err on the side of caution.** If children, cyclists, or other leashed dogs are approaching and your dog is not trained to walk calmly past distractions, consider getting off the sidewalk and having your dog sit on the grass until they pass by. If a child asks to greet your dog, it is okay to say, "Thank you for asking, but not today," or, simply, "No."

Do not allow your dog to criss-cross the bike path as cyclists could be approaching from behind you.

Please note that Brunswick Town ordinance requires a *maximum* six (6) foot lead in public areas. (Part II, Sec. 4-29)

Section 3 - Setting Up Success for Your Dog

On Your First Visit

Prepare for your dog's first visit by exploring the dog park *without* your dog. Enter the off-leash area, walk around, and feel free to ask questions of anyone in the park. Then, when you bring your dog for the first time, you'll be prepared to guide your dog appropriately and less likely to walk into surprises.

The first time your dog comes to the park, try to visit at a relatively quiet time of day so that your dog can experience this new place without being overwhelmed by potential playmates. Most parks experience *peak* usage early in the morning and after work hours on weekdays and at midday on weekends; regular users of the park can tell you when it tends to be busy or quiet here.

When you arrive, stand outside the fence and observe the dogs inside the off-leash area for a few minutes before you enter it. Ask yourself the following questions before deciding to enter:

- Does your dog already know the dogs in the park?
- Are they playing in a manner that's likely to be comfortable for your dog?
- Does your dog look keen to enter or reluctant?

If your dog seems afraid or reluctant to enter, remember that it is better to leave and come back at another time rather than to set your dog up for trouble on the first visit.

If you decide to enter the park, proceed through the double-gated entrance in the following manner:

- Take your LEASHED DOG through the FIRST GATE.
- Close the first gate behind you.
- Remove your dog's leash, halter, and choke or prong collar (if the dog is wearing one) while you are inside the double-gated area.
- Be aware that dogs that are already in the larger fenced area will likely gather around the gate to "meet and greet" your dog.
- Allow your dog to remain in the enclosed area for a few minutes until the other dogs retreat from the entrance area.
- When you AND your dog feel comfortable, OPEN THE SECOND GATE and let your unleashed dog enter the play area.
- Close the second gate behind you and follow your dog into the play area.

On Every Visit

Before entering, assess how many dogs are already playing in the park, the intensity of the play, and whether their owners are paying attention. Does this look like an appropriate situation to bring your dog into? If not, come back at another time.

If you decide to go in, please turn off your cell phone so that it can't distract your attention from your dog.

The entries to both the "Large Dogs" and "Small Dogs" areas are double-gated. If someone is leaving the park with a dog as you're entering, or vice versa, one of you should yield so that you don't have two gates open at once or two (or more) excited dogs meeting in the entryway.

Pass through the first gate, latch it, wait until any dogs inside the play area stop barking at yours, and then unleash your dog *before* going through the second gate. This will enable your dog to move freely if other dogs rush toward it in the play area. (Leashed dogs tend to become frightened or defensive if suddenly surrounded by other dogs.)

Always check to make sure gates are securely latched.

Inside the park, keep moving. Dogs tend to play more when their owners are in motion, and an owner standing or sitting in one place makes it more likely that a dog will guard the surrounding space.

Many dogs pay acute attention to who is entering a dog park, and sometimes dogs will bunch up at the entryway as another is entering. If an entering dog is swarmed and feels threatened, a fight can erupt.

The person inside the entryway should wait until the dogs disperse before allowing the dog in AND/OR the owners inside the play area can call their dogs away from the gate.

While your dog plays, stay engaged: Call your dog periodically, praise and reward, and then say, "Go play!" to put what he's going to do on your queue. Have your dog take occasional breaks from play to make over-arousal less likely.

If another dog owner is not following the posted rules, politely approach that person and ask for cooperation. It may be more comfortable if you ask another dog owner to accompany you. Again, you are the only person who is responsible for your dog's safety and well-being, and all of us are responsible for the park's well-being.

When you leave, leash your dog just before exiting the play area. Afterward, think the experience over: What did your dog learn? What did you learn?

Section 4 - Helpful Resources

BARK will continue to offer educational presentations for the community. The dates and times of upcoming presentations will be sent to our email list and/or posted on our Facebook page.

www.facebook.com/BrunswickMaineDogPark

Watch for upcoming presentations and other events!

Other Resources:

[Download the “Talking Dog” poster](#) – know the body language of dogs!

[Association of Pet Dog Trainers \(APDT\)](#) – Dog Park Information

[Pet Connection](#) – Trainer Diana Logan’s Recommended Resources

[Tree Frog Farm](#) – Dog Training Articles by Trainer Liz Langham

Section 5-Avoiding Good Times Gone Wrong

Healthy Play

Dogs nip while they play, chase, slam each other with their shoulders and hips, lie on top of each other, mount each other, and “fence” with their teeth. It can look scary and confusing to human beings, but it’s how dogs have fun.

The same behaviors, however, can be carried to the point of rudeness and bullying. The following questions can help dog owners sort good, healthy fun from abusive or bullying play:

- Do both dogs look happy most of the time?
- Are their tails, mouths, and movements loose and relaxed (having fun), or are they tight and stiff (not so fun)?
- Is one dog asking for space or trying to get away and the other dog isn’t allowing that? (See “**Stress Signals**” on page 10).
- Is the play edgy, hard-hitting, or causing fear for any participants?
- Is there healthy give and take in the play? Over a few minutes, does the dog who was on top take a turn on the bottom, or does the chaser become the chased?
- Is the play fluid, moving from one activity to another, or are the dogs “stuck”?
- Are two or more dogs ganging up on another who looks stressed?
- Is it becoming so intense that “snarks” and “scuffles” are happening?

If the play is not balanced, comfortable, and clearly happy for all parties, the dogs owners need to redirect the dogs’ activity, settle the offending dogs down with a time out from play (preferably outside the off-leash area), take some dogs home, or, if the Small Dogs area is not in use, move like-minded playmates over there.

Mounting

Mounting is a form of dog play that can be especially volatile, even if the dogs are well matched in size and physical condition. Mounting is not necessarily about reproduction or dominance, but can be a request for attention, an invitation to play, or a way for an overexcited dog to discharge energy. The problem is that some dogs are intolerant of mounting, and so it can trigger fights. Because mounted dogs often react to an innocent dog standing in front of them rather than to the one on top, the behavior can pose risks for surrounding dogs.

If your dog tends to mount, teach an “off” cue and intervene. Better yet, learn to see the behavior coming and redirect your dog before the other one is stressed by it.

Stress Signals

Depending on context, some perfectly mundane dog behaviors can also indicate stress. Some of these behaviors discharge energy that's building up, and some signal that "I'm not looking for trouble!" If you see *combinations* of the following in social situations, look for what may be stressing your dog. If the stressors don't shift and you can't positively influence your dog's experience, then take your dog out of the park.

Signals that may indicate stress, discomfort, or an effort to avoid conflict include:

- increased activity
- marking territory
- scratching
- yawning
- shaking off
- sniffing the ground
- looking directly away from a perceived threat
- lip- or nose-licking
- front paw lift
- approaching slowly and in an arc
- sitting or lying down
- blinking
- sneezing
- slow, careful movements

Signals that request or demand greater distance from another dog include:

- staring
- growling
- snarling
- ears flat against head (uneasy) or erect and forward (confident)
- tension in body and face
- muscle ridges in face
- stalking or very erect, up-on-toes stance
- hair up on back (can also just mean excitement)
- urination and ground scratching
- tail up over back or straight
- tail wagging only at tip
- a brief look-away or turn-away at a tense moment.

Again, many of these behaviors have multiple meanings, and so the trick is to know your dog and read the whole dog in context. If Daisy has one paw raised and her ears back, and she glances away from a dog approaching her, then she's probably feeling uneasy. If she has one paw raised and her ears forward as you head to the cookie jar, then she's probably thinking, "You rock, Mom, and I'll do anything for a cookie!" If you think Daisy is expressing discomfort at the dog park but then her body language loosens up and she goes back to playing freely, no problem—but if she keeps expressing stress or a need for space, it's probably time to go home. If you're not sure, ask someone else how they read her.

Resource Guarding

Some dogs are very protective of objects they value. The resources a dog may guard can be food (including training treats), toys, their owners (“my hunter, my driver, my ball thrower,” etc.), doorways, and more—even feces or holes! Early signs of resource guarding could include hovering in a particular space or over a toy, lip licking (indicating stress), flared whiskers, curling the lip, and freezing as another dog approaches.

If your dog appears to be resource guarding, remove the resource, if possible. If that isn’t possible or doesn’t help, take him/her out of the park before she begins lunging at others or a fight erupts, and come back at a quieter time.

If someone else’s dog is resource guarding, move your dog away from that one, put away anything that seems to arouse the dog’s guarding impulse, point out aggressive behavior to the other owner, or leave.

Snarks and Scuffles

Just as tempers flare on a playground or basketball court, so they do in a dog park. When a dog nips or bumps too hard, another dog may respond by saying, “Hey, you jerk! That hurt!” That’s the meaning of a “snark,” a vocalization that sounds like a combined snarl and bark, and a “scuffle,” which sounds like a fight but ends just as quickly as it started.

If your dog has just had a scuffle, a time out may be advisable. If there are repeated snarks or scuffles, then it may be time to head home for the day and consider whether that particular group of playmates is healthy for your dog.

Fights

If handlers are on the ball, they will preempt rude play or bullying before fights break out. What to do, though, if a fight erupts?

One option is to do nothing. Very few dogs fight to the death, and no dog with a history of serious fighting should be at the dog park in the first place. Children who visit the dog park must be instructed ahead of time to walk *calmly* away from any fighting dogs, even their own: do not run, do not scream, and do not get involved. Shrieking children can trigger tragic behavior from dogs.

Anyone interfering in a fight is at risk of being bitten. Highly aroused dogs do not always know what they’re biting. If a person restrains one dog, the other dog might continue aggressing, provoking the restrained dog to bite the person holding him. Screaming or shouting can escalate tensions and bring more dogs into the fray.

If someone has been knocked down near the fight or the dogs are badly mismatched, it can be almost impossible to stand back. If you feel compelled to intervene in a serious fight, here are some options, ***listed in descending order of safety***.

- Use water: grab a hose, pump tank or throw buckets of water on the dogs.
- Startle the dogs with loud noise, such as a loud whistle, an air horn, or clanging metal.
- Throw coats or blankets over the dogs.
- Use Direct Stop, a citronella-based spray.
- **Owners** can simultaneously lift the tail of each dog in the fight in order to take the dog's back feet off the ground, or...
- Grab the rear legs and pull the dogs out of the fight.
- Release their legs the instant the fighting stops (to avoid getting bitten yourself) and keep the dogs separated.
- As soon as the fighting breaks, immediately lead the dogs away from one another and follow the instructions described in ***After a Fight***, below.

After a Fight

Put each of the dogs involved in the fight on leash, check them for injuries, and assess whether veterinary care is appropriate. (See ***Veterinary Emergencies***, below.)

As after a car accident, calmly exchange relevant information with the other dog owner(s), especially if there's an injury.

Remove the dogs from the park, one at a time.

Even dogs that did not join the fight are likely to be extremely aroused, and their owners also are advised to call it a day.

Individually or collectively, review and evaluate what went wrong: What could have been done to prevent the dogs' interaction from escalating to a fight? Why didn't people see the fight brewing and intervene earlier?

Section 6 - Veterinary Issues

Health Concerns Related to a Dog Park

Just as children are more exposed to contagious illnesses when they go to school, dogs playing at a dog park may have more veterinary issues. Ask your vet what vaccines, flea and tick control, and preventative care are recommended. Also discuss the following risks so that you're well prepared to keep your dog healthy and playful.

Intestinal parasites. Several are transmitted through feces, and some eggs stay in the soil for years. (This and the fact that some insects that feed on feces are disease vectors are two reasons why it's so important to pick up immediately after your dog.)

It's a good idea to have a fecal sample checked for parasites at least twice a year. If you see signs of blood in your dog's stool, take a sample to your vet's office.

Injuries. If your dog begins limping or appears to be injured, end the play session. If soreness persists or recurs, consult your vet.

Canine bloat. This life-threatening condition is caused by gas building up in the stomach and causing it to rotate. It is more likely to occur if dogs with full stomachs exercise vigorously or if dogs who are still panting heavily after exercise load up on water and/or food.

Moderate your dog's water intake during play sessions, and try to separate meals and intense exercise by two hours. For more information, talk to your vet.

Heat stroke. Remember that dogs wear fur coats year round, and their cooling systems are not very efficient: they sweat only through their paws and otherwise cool themselves by panting.

On a hot day, the air can be too warm to help a very hot dog cool itself adequately. Be cautious during the "dog days" of summer: Exercise your pet during the cooler times of day. If you have to go out on a hot afternoon, keep it short, and wet your dog down.

Heat stroke is EXTREMELY DANGEROUS, and can be fatal for your dog! It is important that you are able to recognize the symptoms and respond quickly.

Symptoms of heat stroke, an emergency condition that can cause permanent brain damage or death, include:

- Rapid panting
- Bright red gums
- Unsteadiness
- Vomiting
- Anxious expression or staring appearance

If you wonder if your dog is in trouble or might have heat stroke, call your vet or take your dog to the vet IMMEDIATELY.

Veterinary Emergencies

There are numerous veterinary practices nearby to the dog park. In alphabetical order, they are:

[Androscoggin Animal Hospital](#)

457 Foreside Rd. Topsham, ME 04086
(207)729-4678

[Bath Animal Hospital](#)

15 Congress Ave. Bath, ME 04530
(207)443-9006

[Bath Brunswick Veterinary Associates](#)

257 Bath Rd. Brunswick, ME 04011
(207)729-4164

[Sunray Animal Clinic](#)

73 Admiral Fitch Ave. Brunswick ME 04011
(207)725-6398

[The Veterinary Clinic](#)

304½ Maine St. Brunswick, ME 04011
(207)729-3412

[Topsham Veterinary Wellness Center](#)

10 Monument Place Topsham, ME 04086
(207)406-4468

Animal Emergency Clinics (for after hours and weekends):

[37 Strawberry Ave., Lewiston](#)

(207)777-1110

[739 Warren Ave in Portland](#)