

Visitor Support for Dog Restriction at Heil Valley Ranch, Hall Ranch and Rabbit Mountain

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Introduction

Background

When the North Foothills Open Space (Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch) properties were acquired, they were recognized for their wildlife habitat value. As such, the decision was made to restrict dogs at these two properties to protect that value. This decision is up for review in 2005. In order to inform this decision, the Board of County Commissioners will receive feedback from resident caretakers, wildlife biologists and the public via this opinion survey.

Past Studies

Since the late 1980s, Boulder County has implemented several studies to gauge public opinion about various issues, such as the performance of the County Parks and Open Space program and the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

In a telephone survey conducted in 2002 by the National Research Center Inc., 81% of Boulder County residents approved of the work done by Boulder County Parks and Open Space. Regarding habitat preservation and trail closures, 75% of respondents support the closure of select trails to dogs in sensitive wildlife areas, 91% support general closures for the preservation of sensitive wildlife areas, and 94% support closures to protect wildlife during certain parts of the year. In the same study, 73% of respondents said that walking dogs was an important activity. These surveys were highly reliable, with a statistical sampling error of + or - 4%.

Study Purpose and Objectives

The present study's purpose is to provide input from the public to BCPOS Management and the BOCC regarding Regulation #2004-101-5d. This regulation states "Dogs may be prohibited on specific County Parks and Open Space areas by action of the Board (of County Commissioners)." This regulation is currently applied at Heil Valley Ranch and Hall Ranch for protection of sensitive wildlife habitat. The restriction has been in place for four years, and is up for review by the BOCC in 2005.

The objective of this study is to evaluate and report the opinions of visitors at Hall Ranch, Heil Valley Ranch and Rabbit Mountain regarding Regulation #2004-101-5d.

Methods

Survey Design.

The data collection instrument was a self-administered questionnaire (Appendix A). This instrument asked respondents several questions regarding their awareness of the dog restriction at Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch, if they agreed with the restriction and whether or not they owned a dog.

Data Collection and Sampling

Resource Management staff, Senior Property Tax Work-Off program participants and volunteers collected surveys during the summer and fall of 2004. Surveyors collected 434 surveys at Heil Valley Ranch, Hall Ranch and Rabbit Mountain. Staff chose to sample not only the properties where the dog restriction is applied, but also nearby Rabbit Mountain as a control group where dogs are allowed on-leash.

The sampling plan was divided into weekday and weekend periods. Survey time periods were 8:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m., 12:01 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. and 4:01 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. Days and time periods were selected randomly. If a day or time period was cancelled due to weather or staff availability, the next available day was surveyed. Saturdays and Sundays were interchangeable for weekends, and Mondays thru Fridays were interchangeable for weekdays. Since weekend visitation exceeds weekday visitation, the sampling was weighted toward weekends to more accurately represent actual visitation by the population.

Surveys were collected for each time period on both weekdays and weekends. Our goal was to collect at least 100 surveys per park, which we accomplished (Appendix B). Surveys were collected at the parks' trailheads. In the case of Hall Ranch, more than one trailhead exists. However, the majority of visitors to Hall Ranch utilize the Highway 7 entrance, therefore sampling occurred only at this trailhead to maximize efficiency. Table 1 reflects the sample size and sampling error for each park surveyed. These were exit surveys, so visitors were contacted as they were leaving the trail system.

Eight survey shifts were cancelled due to staffing problems and bad weather and were not re-scheduled. Six of these shifts were for Rabbit Mountain.

Table 1. Sample Size and Sampling Error by Park

	Sample Size	Sampling Error
Hall Ranch	145	8.1%
Heil Valley Ranch	174	7.2%
Rabbit Mountain	115	8.9%
TOTAL	434	4.1%

These sampling errors were calculated with a 95% confidence level. For example, we can be 95% certain that the overall results are within 4.1% of the percentages stated for the overall results.

Trained staff and volunteers collected information on respondents' recreation activities along with their opinions about the dog restriction. Though the number and type of respondents varied at each property, the proportion of respondents surveyed was representative of the overall visitation at each property. Table 2 compares the respondents' activity types with overall activity types at these three properties in 2004.

Table 2. Overall Visitor Activities Compared to Respondents' Activities, 2004

	DOG WALKERS	HIKERS	BIKERS	RUNNERS	EQUES.	OTHER
2004 Dog Survey Respondents	2%	37%	45%	8%	5%	3%
2004 Visitation at these Properties	3%*	37%	48%	4%	4%	7%

*=Data from a 2002 study for Boulder County by the Public Information Corporation.

Results

The results are divided into two main sections. First, results are summarized as an overview section illustrating respondents' opinions from all three properties. Second, results are highlighted by the properties where the regulation is in place (Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch), and where it is not (Rabbit Mountain). Both sections are broken down by opinions among dog owners and non-dog owners.

Twenty-seven survey sessions resulted in 81 hours of data collection yielding 434 valid surveys and 170 refusals, for a response rate of 72%. A total of 914 visitors were observed in the parks during survey hours, therefore approximately 48% of the total number of visitors observed actually completed surveys.

Overview

A brief look at each of the two property types surveyed (dogs restricted, dogs allowed) separately gives a representative picture of which visitors support the regulation, which do not, and which "don't know" if they support it or not.

Table 3. Support for the Regulation by Properties With and Without the Restriction.

	Support	Don't Support	Don't Know	Blank
Hall/Heil (dogs restricted)	65%	25%	8%	2%
Rabbit (dogs allowed)	44%	34%	21%	2%

Table 3 shows that the majority of respondents from both groups support this regulation, though less strongly at Rabbit Mountain, where dogs are allowed. Further, 21% of respondents at Rabbit Mountain stated that they "don't know" if they support the regulation or not. That is nearly three times as high as the same response from Hall and Heil, where dogs are restricted.

Property Highlights

In this section each of these two groups (dogs restricted, dogs allowed) is highlighted individually, and the reasons respondents gave for their opinions are outlined.

Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch (dogs restricted)

Table 4 highlights the opinions of respondents at these two properties about this restriction.

Table 4. Support for Regulation at Hall and Heil by Dog-Ownership.

	Support	Don't Support	Don't Know	Blank
Hall & Heil (N=319)	65%	25%	8%	2%
Dog owners (N=123)	56%	39%	4%	1%
Non Dog owners (N=192)	71%	17%	11%	1%
Blank (N=4)	75%	0	25%	0

Among those who indicated whether they owned a dog or not, support is highest among non-dog owners. Conversely, non-support is highest among dog owners. In addition, nearly three times as many non-dog owners than dog owners stated they “don’t know” if they support it or not.

The reasons that respondents gave for their opinions can better illuminate support for this regulation. Fifty-eight percent of respondents from Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch stated reasons for their support or non-support. Therefore, 42% of respondents did not state any reasons for their opinions. Box 1 illustrates the top five reasons respondents at Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch gave for supporting this regulation.

Box 1. Top Five Reasons at Heil Valley Ranch and Hall Ranch for Supporting Regulation

Five Most Frequent Reasons for Supporting Restriction (as % of total support at Hall and Heil):

- Ecological Concerns (23%)
- Mountain Bike Concerns (14%)
- Keep the Area Dog Free (13%)
- Irresponsible Dog Owners (11%)
- Leash Violations (11%)

Examples:

“I think dogs would negatively affect wildlife.” (Ecological Concerns)

“Dogs and bikes don’t mix well.” (Mountain Bike Concerns)

“There are only two places I can hike and run without dogs.” (Keep the Area Dog Free)

Most respondents were concerned about the wildlife ecology impacts of dogs at these properties, and many were concerned about mountain bikes interacting with dogs (see Appendices C and D for details).

Next, Box 2 illustrates the top five reasons respondents at Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch stated for *not* supporting this regulation.

Box 2. Top Five Reasons at Heil Valley Ranch and Hall Ranch for Not Supporting Regulation

Five Most Frequent Reasons for Not Supporting Restriction (as % of total non-support at Hall and Heil):

- Leashed Dogs Should Be Allowed (20%)
- Dog Owners Would Enjoy Bringing Dogs Here (18%)
- Well-behaved Dogs Should Be Allowed (14%)
- Dog Owners' Should Be Held Responsible (13%)
- Dogs Are Not a Problem (9%)

Examples:

"I think dogs on leash wouldn't affect wildlife any more than the human on the trail." (Leashed Dogs Should Be Allowed)
"I have a dog and would like to bring her along." (Dog Owners Would Enjoy Bringing Dogs Here)
"It's the owners that need to be more regulated." (Dog Owners' Should Be Held Responsible)

Rabbit Mountain (dogs allowed)

Opinion surveys were collected at Rabbit Mountain as a type of "control" effort. That is, staff wanted to balance opinions of those already using the "non-dog" parks with those at the nearest property where dogs are allowed. As such, Table 5 illustrates the opinions of respondents from Rabbit Mountain.

Table 5. Support for Regulation at Rabbit Mountain by Dog-Ownership.

	Support	Don't Support	Don't Know	Blank
Rabbit (N=115)	44%	34%	21%	2%
Dog owners (N=58)	36%	48%	14%	2%
Non Dog owners (N=57)	51%	19%	28%	2%

Support for the dog restriction was 10% higher than non-support, the smallest gap in support between the two surveyed groups. Among dog owners, non-support (48%) was higher than support (36%). Interestingly, the highest percentage of "don't know" was at Rabbit Mountain, with 21% of the total and 28% among non-dog owners.

Eighty-three percent of respondents at Rabbit Mountain stated reasons for their support or non-support of this regulation, while 17% did not state any reasons (Appendices C and D). Box 3 outlines the stated reasons for support of this restriction at Rabbit Mountain.

Five Most Frequent Reasons for Supporting Restriction (as % of total support at Rabbit):

- Ecological Concerns (22%)
- Keep Area Dog Free (15%)
- Dog Behavior is Problem (11%)
- Irresponsible Dog Owners are Problem (11%)
- General Support (9%)

Examples:

"The dogs' instincts to chase other species are too strong." (Ecological Concerns)
"There need to be 'dog-free zones'—as much as I love dogs!" (Keep Area Dog Free)
"Dogs, like all animals, no matter how well-trained, are unpredictable." (Dog Behavior is Problem)

Again, ecological concerns were the main reasons respondents gave for supporting the restriction. Other respondents were interested in keeping the area "dog-free" for everyone, and still others thought that the natural behavior of dogs was an issue.

Box 4. Top Five Reasons for Not Supporting Regulation at Rabbit Mountain

Five Most Frequent Reasons for Not Supporting Restriction (as % of total non-support at Rabbit):

- Leashed Dogs Should Be Allowed (44%)
- Dog Owners' Should Be Held Responsible (13%)
- Dogs Should Be Allowed Here (10%)
- Dog Owners Would Enjoy Bringing Dogs Here (10%)
- Ecological Concerns (6%)

Examples:

"I feel leashed dogs would be fine." (Leashed Dogs Should Be Allowed)

"As long as owner has control (of dog) it should be allowed anywhere." (Dog Owners' Should Be Held Responsible)

"Dogs should be free." (Dogs Should Be Allowed Here)

Discussion

The results from this study will be used to inform BCPOS Management and the BOCC about public opinion regarding Regulation #2004-101-5d. This regulation states that "Dogs may be prohibited on specific County Parks and Open Space areas by action of the Board (of County Commissioners)." This regulation is currently applied at Heil Valley Ranch and Hall Ranch for protection of sensitive wildlife habitat. The restriction has been in place for four years, and is up for review by the BOCC in late 2005.

Appendix A.

The Survey Instrument

Part 1: questionnaire for Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch

Boulder County Parks and Open Space
HVR/HAR
Visitor Surveys 2004

1. Which of these activities were you doing TODAY (circle one)?

Hike. Bike Run Horseback Other (please indicate): _____
How many are in your group? _____

2. Please rate your experience at Heil Valley Ranch TODAY on the following scale, with 1 being "poor" and 5 being "excellent" (circle one).

1 2 3 4 5
poor ok excellent

Please briefly explain why you rated your experience the way you did:

3. Which of the following choices best describes how LEASHED dogs affect wildlife (circle one)?

Neutral effect Positive effect Negative effect Don't Know

4. Which of the following choices best describes how UN-LEASHED dogs affect wildlife (circle one)?

Neutral effect Positive effect Negative effect Don't Know

5. Are you aware that dogs are *not allowed* at Heil Valley Ranch/Hall Ranch (circle one)?

Yes No

6. Do you support this regulation or not (circle one)?

Yes No Don't Know

Please briefly explain why you said what you did:

7. Do you currently own a dog?

Yes No

8. Anything else you would like to add?

If you need more space, continue writing on the back of this sheet...

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey today!

Appendix A.

The Survey Instrument

Part 2: questionnaire for Rabbit Mountain

Boulder County Parks and Open Space

RM

Visitor Surveys 2004

1. Which of these activities were you doing TODAY (circle one)?

Hike Walk dog Bike Run Horseback Other (please indicate): _____

How many are in your group? _____

2. Please rate your experience at Rabbit Mountain TODAY on the following scale, with 1 being "poor" and 5 being "excellent" (circle one).

1 2 3 4 5
poor *ok* *excellent*

Please briefly explain why you rated your experience the way you did:

3. Which of the following choices best describes how LEASHED dogs affect wildlife (circle one)?

Neutral effect Positive effect Negative effect Don't Know

4. Which of the following choices best describes how UN-LEASHED dogs affect wildlife (circle one)?

Neutral effect Positive effect Negative effect Don't Know

5. Are you aware that dogs are *not allowed* at neighboring open space areas, Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch (circle one)?

Yes No

6. Do you support this regulation or not (circle one)?

Yes No Don't Know

Please briefly explain why you said what you did:

7. Do you currently own a dog?

Yes No

8. Anything else you would like to add?
-

If you need more space, continue writing on the back of this sheet...

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey today!

Appendix B.

Survey Schedule and Surveys Collected

<i>Property</i>	<i>Survey Date</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Shift</i>	<i>Hours</i>	<i>Surveys Collected</i>
Hall Ranch	5/29/2004	Weekend	Morning	3	26
	6/4/2004	Weekday	Afternoon	3	6
	6/5/2004	Weekend	Morning	3	25
	6/5/2004	Weekend	Afternoon	3	8
	6/26/2004	Weekend	Evening	3	6
	7/1/2004	Weekday	Evening	3	10
	7/11/2004	Weekend	Morning	3	31
	7/31/2004	Weekend	Afternoon	3	10
	8/12/2004	Weekday	Evening	3	13
	9/3/2004	Weekday	Afternoon	3	10
			30	145	
Heil Valley Ranch					
	6/11/2004	Weekday	Evening	3	13
	6/13/2004	Weekend	Afternoon	3	33
	7/10/2004	Weekend	Afternoon	3	16
	7/25/2004	Weekend	Morning	3	18
	7/28/2004	Weekday	Evening	3	12
	8/1/2004	Weekend	Morning	3	32
	8/19/2004	Weekday	Morning	3	9
	9/2/2004	Weekday	Afternoon	3	10
	9/12/2004	Weekend	Afternoon	3	31
			27	174	
Rabbit Mountain					
	6/25/2004	Afternoon		3	8
	7/3/2004	Afternoon		3	20
	8/21/2004	Morning		3	15
	8/26/2004	Evening		3	5
	8/29/2004	Morning		3	28
	9/3/2004	Afternoon		3	22
	9/29/2004	Afternoon		3	17
				21	115

Appendix C.

Stated Reasons for Opinions of Regulation #2004-101-5d (Dog Restriction) at Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch

Hall Ranch				
Visitor Status	Visitor N (%)	Support Status	Status N (%)	Reasons Stated for Support Status (N)
<u>Dog Owners</u>	65 (45%)	Support the Regulation	40 (62%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological Concerns (7) • Other Places for Dogs (3) • Irresponsible Dog Owners (3) • Danger Concerns (3) • Leash Violations (3) • Too Crowded (3) • Keep Dog Free (3) • Mountain Bike Concerns (3) • Equestrian Concerns (2) • General Support (1) • Leashed Dogs OK (1) • Alternative Options (1)
		Do Not Support the Regulation	24 (37%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs Should Be Allowed (4) • Well-Behaved Dogs OK (4) • Dog Owners Would Enjoy (3) • Leashed Dogs OK (3) • Dog Owners' Responsibility (3) • Others Are Worse (2) • Dogs Not a Problem (1) • Other (1)
		Don't Know	1 (1%)	No reasons stated.

Non-Dog Owners	80 (55%)	Support the Regulation	60 (75%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological Concerns (13) • Leash Violations (5) • Keep Dog Free (5) • Mountain Bike Concerns (5) • Danger Concerns (4) • Dog Feces Concerns (3) • Irresponsible Dog Owners (2) • Other Places for Dogs (2) • Equestrian Concerns (1) • General Support (1) • Dogs Should Be Allowed (1) • Multiple Use Concerns (1) • Don't Like Dogs (1) • Alternative Options (1)
		Do Not Support the Regulation	14 (18%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leashed Dogs OK (4) • Dog Owners' Responsibility (2) • Alternative Options (2) • Mountain Bike Concerns (1) • Don't Own a Dog (1) • Dog Owners Would Enjoy (1) • Dogs Not a Problem (1) • Other (1)
		Don't Know	6 (8%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog Owners' Responsibility (1) • Dogs Should Be Allowed (1) • Well-Behaved Dogs OK (1)

Heil Valley Ranch				
Visitor Status	Visitor N (%)	Support Status	Status N (%)	Reasons Stated for Support Status (N)
<u>Dog Owners</u>	58 (34%)	Support the Regulation	29 (50%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep Dog Free (7) • Irresponsible Dog Owners (7) • Mountain Bike Concerns (4) • Other Places for Dogs (4) • Ecological Concerns (3) • Alternative Options (3) • Leash Violations (2) • Leashed Dogs OK (2) • Too Crowded (1) • Multiple-Use Concerns (1) • Dog Behavior (1)
		Do Not Support the Regulation	24 (41%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog Owners Would Enjoy (6) • Well-Behaved Dogs OK (5) • Dog Owners' Responsibility (4) • Dogs Not a Problem (3) • Leashed Dogs OK (3) • Horses OK, Dogs OK (2) • Alternative Options (1)
		Don't Know	4 (7%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Support (1) • Mountain Bike Concerns (1) • Equestrian Concerns (1)
		Left Blank	1 (2%)	Left Blank
Non-Dog Owners	112 (64%)	Support the Regulation	78 (70%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological Concerns (17) • Mountain Bike Concerns (11) • Irresponsible Dog Owners (8) • Other Places for Dogs (7) • Leash Violations (7) • Keep Dog Free (7) • Dog Feces Concerns (6) • Danger Concerns (4) • Too Crowded (3) • Afraid of Dogs (2) • Dog Behavior (2) • General Support (2) • Leashed Dogs OK (2) • Dogs Not a Problem (2) • Don't Like Dogs (1) • Not Enough Information (1) • Other (1)

		Do Not Support the Regulation	18 (16%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leashed Dogs OK (4) • Dog Owners Would Enjoy (3) • Dogs Should Be Allowed (2) • Dog Behavior (2) • Horses OK, Dogs OK (1) • Like Dogs (1) • Dogs Not a Problem (1) • Well-Behaved Dogs OK (1) • Alternative Options (1)
		Don't Know	15 (13%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Enough Information (3) • Conditional Comments (2) • Leashed Dogs OK (2) • Dog Owners' Responsibility (1) • No Opinion (1)
		Left Blank	1 (<1%)	Left Blank
Left Blank	4 (2%)	Support the Regulation	3 (75%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological Concerns (1) • Mountain Bike Concerns (1) • Dog Behavior (1)
		Do Not Support the Regulation	0	
		Don't Know	1 (25%)	• Conditional Comment (1)
		Left Blank	0	

Rabbit Mountain				
Visitor Status	Visitor N (%)	Support Status	Status N (%)	Reasons Stated for Support Status (N)
Dog Owners	58 (50%)	Support the Regulation	21 (36%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological Concerns (4) • Keep Dog Free (3) • General Support (2) • Irresponsible Dog Owners (2) • Too Crowded (1) • Dog Feces Concerns (1) • Mountain Bike Concerns (1) • Dogs Should Be Allowed (1) • Leashed Dogs OK (1) • Dog Behavior (1)
		Do Not Support the Regulation	28 (48%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leashed Dogs OK (10) • Dog Owners' Responsibility (3) • Ecological Concerns (2) • Dogs Should Be Allowed (2) • Dog Owners Would Enjoy (2) • Dog Behavior (1) • Alternative Options (1) • Well-Behaved Dogs OK (1) • General Non-Support (1) • Other (1)
		Don't Know	8 (14%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Enough Information (2) • Ecological Concerns (1) • Dog Behavior (1) • Other Places for Dogs (1) • Leashed Dogs OK (1) • Danger Concerns (1)
		Left Blank	1 (2%)	Left Blank
Non-Dog Owners	57 (50%)	Support the Regulation	29 (51%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecological Concerns (6) • Keep Dog Free (4) • Dog Behavior (4) • Irresponsible Dog Owners (3) • Leash Violations (3) • General Support (2) • Other Places for Dogs (2) • Dog Feces Concerns (2) • Danger Concerns (2) • Afraid of Dogs (1) • Don't Like Dogs (1) • Alternative Options (1)

		Do Not Support the Regulation	11 (19%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leashed Dogs OK (4) • Dog Owners Would Enjoy (1) • Dogs Not a Problem (1) • Dog Owners' Responsibility (1) • Dogs Should Be Allowed (1)
		Don't Know	16 (28%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't Own a Dog (3) • Dogs Should Be Allowed (2) • Afraid of Dogs (1) • Well-behaved Dogs OK (1) • Leashed Dogs OK (1) • Not Enough Information (1) • Ecological Concerns (1) • Alternative Options (1)
		Left Blank	1 (2%)	Left Blank

RM n = 115

34% don't support
44% support