

Impact Statement - Adventure Playground

>Questions for Impact Statement

>1) What is the nature and/or brief description of  
>your group?

A: The Children's Events help promote the diverse cultural and recreational activities that High Park offers in a manner compatible with the natural environment and character of the park. We aim to make a lasting impression on the children/adults of the general public (both local and regionally) that participate in our grassroots events. The benefit to the community is that children can come to High Park and experience an event that would normally be held outside of the City.

>2) What is the impact of the off-leash area and  
>dogs in the park on your group?

A: off-leash has no impact to us and as for dogs in general, you may want to post a sign on the info board across from the playground informing users that they can contact the K9 committee to provide recommendations\concerns to them.

>3) Do you have any suggestions for the off-leash  
>area and dogs in the park?

A: see #2

>4) A draft version of the report will be made  
>available prior to public release for further comment,  
>would your group be interested in reviewing the draft  
>report?

>5) Additional comments and suggestions?

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>

Impact Statement - Built Environment and Safety

John, from a Built Environment and Safety Committee perspective, I don't have a lot to offer, as the Dog Off-Leash area does not have a lot of impact, however I do offer the following comments:

- 1 - If the Off-Leash area is to be moved, consider the Nature Centre programs in relation as there have been some incidents whereby children were frightened as the program went close to the current Off-Leash area.
- 2 - Is it possible to have rotating areas (example - move to another area during time of Canstage)
- 3 - Maybe consider different areas by season
- 4 - Maybe consider multiple smaller areas
  - The unused area right on Parkside Drive just north of the parking area at Spring Road traffic light
  - How about the destroyed area where the BMX bicyclists go in the south east corner (kill two birds with one stone!)
  - Utilize the closed road behind the TTC loop for a dog run (although there is some sensitive areas along there and might have to be fenced)
  - The large field south of the zoo parking lot or the area between that field and the lower section of Spring Road (would have to consider proximity to playground).

I think you're doing a great job at trying to organize and resolve these issues, but we must all continue to pressure the City for By-Law enforcement no matter what.

So those would be my thoughts.....

## Impact Statement Children's Garden

1. What is the nature and/or brief description of your group?

### High Park Children's Garden

2. What is the impact of the off-leash area and dogs in the park on your group?

The only time we really come into contact with dogs is when we are leading guided nature walks in the ravine. Generally dog owners are pretty good about having their dogs on leash, but every once in a while there are dogs in the ravine that are not on leash, are running off trail (potentially interfering with animal habitats and native plant species), and could potentially startle a group of 10-20 students/campers. That being said, the area is clearly marked as a leashed area...

Do you have any suggestions for the off-leash area and dogs in the park?

The only suggestion that I have relating to dogs in the park is that the park looks into alternative means of disposing of dog waste. It seems silly to send so much organic material to landfill, and I do not think that community members will realistically take the waste home with them to greenbin it.

3. A draft version of the report will be made available prior to public release for further comment, would your group be interested in reviewing the draft report?

I dont think it is necessary.

4. Additional comments and suggestions?

Thank you for being so committed to keeping High Park a shared space that meets the needs of all community members!

Risa Alyson Strauss

Program Specialist  
Children's Garden & Exploring Toronto Programs  
Parks, Forestry and Recreation  
City of Toronto  
416-392-1329

Hi John,

Sorry for being unclear - by ravine I mean the western ravine, that runs along side the stream, leading out to grenadier pond. We take school groups on guided nature walks in the spring and we take our eco camp to the ravine in the summer.

Risa Alyson Strauss

Program Specialist  
Children's Garden & Exploring Toronto Programs  
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>>> The High Park off-leash area review committee <k9@highpark.org> 6/12/2007 12:51 PM

>>>

Thank you for your impact statement. Just to clarify, by ravine do you mean the area behind the Children's Garden (near Colbourne lodge)? Please feel free to forward any future dog-related issues to the High Park K9 committee.

John Cleary

## Impact Statement – Colborne Lodge

1) What is the nature and/or brief description of your group?

Colborne Lodge is the 19th-century home of High Park founders, John and Jemima Howard. The Lodge offers general public programming, including school and children's camp walks within the park.

2) What is the impact of the off-leash area and dogs in the park on your group?

Camp staff report occasional conflicts with dogs and their owners while on the off-leash trails. And, occasionally we encounter unleashed dogs on the west lawn during educational programs and special events. Sometimes the children are frightened of the dogs. In both cases these situations can be difficult when the dog owners are confrontational.



**Toronto Entomologists' Association**  
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June 15, 2007

High Park Community Advisory Council  
Off-leash Area Review Committee

We are pleased to have the opportunity to provide input to the review of the off-leash area and dog activity in High Park.

**1) What is the nature and/or brief description of your group?**

The Toronto Entomologists' Association (T.E.A.) welcomes everyone who is interested in the insects of Ontario. We are an association of mostly amateur entomologists. Although our meetings are held in Toronto, we extend far beyond that in our field trips, our membership, and our seasonal summaries. The T.E.A. is a registered charity and a non-profit educational and scientific organization formed to promote interest in insects, to encourage co-operation among amateur and professional entomologists, to educate and inform non-entomologists about insects, entomology and related fields, to aid in the preservation of insects and their habitats and to issue publications in support of these objectives.

**2) What is the impact of the off-leash area and dogs in the park on your group?**

High Park is a significant natural area within the Toronto region. It offers opportunities for a variety of insect studies and observations and is known to be used for this purpose by amateur naturalists and by a number of educational institutions (e.g. University of Toronto Department of Zoology). Insects are an integral and vital part of the natural environment. Annual records from the Toronto Centre butterfly count include observations from High Park; these count records are compiled by the North American Butterfly Association to provide an overview of butterfly patterns, which in turn reflect the state of the environment across the continent. Also, our association and the High Park Nature Centre jointly sponsor an annual Moth Night, for which records have been maintained for about a decade. Many historic specimens of insects collected in High Park are maintained at the Royal Ontario Museum.

Dog activity in High Park presents a serious threat to the health of the natural environment, both terrestrial and aquatic. The erosion, trampling and disturbance caused by dogs in natural areas have a negative impact on insect populations. Insects often have very specific requirements, such as particular host plants, and cannot thrive if their habitat is subject to excessive disturbance. In particular, healthy groundcover and nectar-producing plants are essential for many terrestrial species. Some insect species that are found in small, isolated populations can vanish completely during a single breeding season when their habitat is disturbed.

### **3) Do you have any suggestions for the off-leash area and dogs in the park?**

The off-leash area should not extend into the prime natural areas of High Park, such as the oak woodlands, forests and ravines that flank the present off-leash trails. A specific fenced area could be set aside for off-leash use, provided it can be accessed without excessive traffic passing through the natural areas.

The area currently used as Dog Hill is on land that was historically oak savannah. The sandy soil that forms the basis of the savannah is easily eroded and not suitable for high traffic uses. This is true of most other areas in the park as well.

Dogs, whether on- or off-leash, should not be permitted in any of the park's waterways, since they damage the aquatic and edge vegetation and disturb aquatic wildlife.

Dogs within the on-leash areas should be kept on designated trails and not allowed to disturb the natural areas that are off the trail. This is important even outside the growing season, since damage to the understory can occur at all times in the year.

Locating off-leash trails within natural areas or near creeks or ponds is not practical. In practice, dog owners do not keep dogs on trail in such areas. The only way to control dogs from leaving the trail is to totally fence each trail, which is costly to maintain in good working order. Excessive fencing also limits access for all park users, including people who wish to study nature in the park, and can be an eye-sore as well. It can also obstruct the natural movement of wildlife through the park.

### **4) A draft version of the report will be made available prior to public release for further comment, would your group be interested in reviewing the draft report?**

Yes.

### **5) Additional comments and suggestions?**

High Park is a living laboratory that should be preserved for posterity. It is one of the most northern remnants of Carolinian habitat in Ontario and the best example of this habitat type in the Toronto region. Its black oak savannah and woodlands, a nationally rare plant community, harbours not only a number of rare plants, but also rare insects that are associated with this distinct habitat. For example:

- High Park has one of the most extensive growths of Wild Lupine in the province, the host plant of the Karner Blue butterfly which historically occurred in High Park but is now extirpated from Ontario. It is an endangered species throughout its North American range. Toronto Zoo is involved in a plan to breed this species, so there is a possibility that it may be reintroduced sometime in the future.
- Edward's Hairstreak, a small butterfly which occurs locally throughout its range and is associated with oak saplings, commonly occurred in High Park as recently as the mid-1990s. This species is now known to occur in only one other location in the Toronto region. With the regeneration of oaks in High Park due to the restoration program, suitable habitat may once again bring this species back to the park.
- High Park provides breeding and migration habitat for a number of other species of butterflies, dragonflies and other insects that are uncommon or rare in our region.

Much is still not known about insects, and High Park offers a unique opportunity for people of all ages and levels of interest to conduct insect studies in habitats that are rare, yet accessible within our urban environment. For a number of years, the City has been making a substantial investment to restore the natural areas of High Park because of their uniqueness not only locally, but on a provincial and international level as well. For the restoration to succeed, the park must be protected.

Submitted by:

Bob and Karen Yukich  
On behalf of the Toronto Entomologists' Association

HIGH PARK WALKING TOURS  
Diana Teal, Coordinator  
416-392-1748 ext. 6

Questions for Impact Statement

1) What is the nature and/or brief description of your group?

The High Park Walking Tours program is coordinated by the High Park Nature Centre. We offer tours for adults and families every other week in various natural areas of the park. Walks occur on Sunday afternoons during the colder months and Tuesday evenings during the warmer months. Walk hosts and leaders are volunteers.

2) What is the impact of the off-leash area and dogs in the park on your group?

We ask all participants to leash their dogs if the dog is accompanying them. I have experienced some resistance to this even when the walk is taking place in an on-leash area - getting the typical response "But my dog is friendly and well behaved." That said, I have only had 2-3 people try to come on a walk with their dog and refuse to leash the dog.

I have not had many negative experiences when on a walking tour - I have noticed many dogs off-leash in on-leash natural areas (especially on the "West Ravine Trails") but have not had any incidences.

3) Do you have any suggestions for the off-leash area and dogs in the park?

More enforcement and more signage! People are not respecting the fact that the park is a multi-use park and that off-leash areas are not only for off-leash dogs. People are also using the "my dog is friendly" line a lot to excuse themselves from obeying the boundaries of the off-leash area. I strongly believe that the focus needs to be on responsible dog ownership but also on educating people about the natural environment of the park. If people don't know that this part is an important part of our natural heritage, then why do we expect them to care?

4) A draft version of the report will be made available prior to public release for further comment, would your group be interested in reviewing the draft report?

Yes.

5) Additional comments and suggestions?



# HIGH PARK COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

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## **Impact Statement for High Park off-leash area and dogs in the park.**

### **1. About our group**

The High Park Canine (K9) committee is a sub-committee of, and reports to the High Park Community Advisory Council (HPCAC), consisting of a group of responsible dog-owners working to promote the appropriate use of High Park and the High Park off-leash area by dog-owners and their dogs. Our mandate includes the following principals: liason, management, educate, stewardship and socialize. A full description of our mandate can be found in the attached document

### **2. The impact of the off-leash area and dogs in the park on our group**

There is a strong and historical presence of dog-owners within High Park, resulting in both a beneficial and detrimental impact on the park. Detrimental impacts, such as increased wear and tear on park environment, conflicts with other park users and pet waste are manageable and on par with other high use activities. There is nothing inherent to the activities associated with off-leash dog usage that, with proper planning, infrastructure and maintenance, would prohibit their placement within areas currently associated with human activities such as the nature trails, wooded areas and pedestrian paths of High Park.

There are a number of benefits to the presence of the off-leash area within High Park. Unlike most park users, dog-owners visit the park more frequently, often during off-hours, such as early in the morning and late at night. The presence of an off-leash area within a park increases the property value of the surrounding community, while at the same time the presence of dog-owners within a park serves as a deterrent to criminal activity. For the dogs themselves, off-leash play within the safety of the off-leash area provides socialization and exercise, making them less aggressive and reducing the risk of conflict with other dogs and park users. Well-exercised dogs are less likely to create a nuisance by barking excessively and destroying property. Off-leash areas, if properly promoted, reduces the likelihood that dogs will be let loose in other recreational areas where they could infringe upon other park users. Dogs help people socialize and get to know each other better, thereby building a sense of community. These social aspect of an off-leash area help to enforce the basic rules of dog ownership such as cleaning up after your dog, controlling your dog's behavior as well as helping to disseminate any important information about the off-leash area.

The K9 committee acknowledges the general lack of compliance with leash laws in High Park and countering this attitude is a major focus of the committee. Based on experience however, attitudes are unlikely to change unless the City of Toronto increases both enforcement and additional off-leash space.

### 3. Suggestion for the off-leash area and dogs in the park

The current problems with the off-leash area do not stem from the inherent activities of dogs, off-leash or on-leash, but from over-use due to lack of available off-leash space, neglect of maintenance and upkeep of existing facilities, and a historical lack of preparation in the original establishment of the off-leash area. We question why attempts have not been made to restore natural areas within the off-leash area, why large section of nature trails have, up until only recently, remained unfenced and why access to the slopes of ravine system remain open in numerous places. Furthermore in a review of existing documents related to the High Park, the K9 committee cannot find a single instance recommending removal, alterations or even minor routing changes within the off-leash area. In fact, with a small amount of additional fencing, increased maintenance and restoration efforts the K9 committee cannot find a reason why the off-leash area cannot continue to reside within its current locale.

While it may appear logical to simply eliminate or move the existing off-leash area, this argument has some serious flaws: (1) Moving the off-leash area would require a large capital investment for fencing, infrastructure and planning – an investment that has already been made in the existing area; (2) Radical changes to the off-leash area will result in public confusion, owner resentment and an overall increase in non-compliance; and (3) No suitable alternative sites exists within High Park. In regards to the current site, historic neglect of maintenance and a lack of proper setup has created a number of problems that need addressing. These problems and potential solutions are listed in the tables provided below:

Problems and solutions for issues related to nature environment issues

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Cause(s)</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
<b>Damaged Trees on Dog Hill</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lack of proper traffic assessment at onset of off-leash area</li> <li>- lack of monitoring and protection</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify trees most likely in danger and put in place limited fencing around tree as temporary solution</li> <li>- education campaign for dog owners about importance of trees to park and off-leash area</li> </ul> <p><i>Long Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- identify source of tree damage</li> <li>- Develop strategy with Urban Forestry for permanent natural solutions to displace dog activity underneath trees (if dogs are determined as source of problem)</li> </ul>
<b>Soil erosion and ground cover loss on slope of Dog Hill</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- overuse of area</li> <li>- lack of proper traffic assessment at outset of off-leash area</li> <li>- lack of monitoring and</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pilot project for renewal of ground cover – small 10x10 fenced off plots on slopes around Dog Hill to determine best method to revitalize ground cover</li> </ul>

	<p>protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lack of restoration efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mapping of Dog Hill to identify areas susceptible to further erosion</li> <li>- encourage alternative routes to and from Dog Hill</li> </ul> <p><i>Long Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rotational fencing system for usage of paths to and from Dog Hill</li> <li>- formalize main Dog Hill area with natural and artificial barriers to contain sand and dog activity</li> <li>- explore possibility of movable Dog Hill picnic benches to promote alternative sites during rotational restoration efforts.</li> </ul>
<b>Poor ground conditions on off-leash Nature Trails</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- overuse of area</li> <li>- lack of proper traffic assessment at outset of off-leash area</li> <li>- lack of monitoring and protection</li> <li>- improper trail material</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use brush and plant material to close off side trails and place small discrete signs indicating "Unofficial Trail – Please do not use"</li> <li>- Develop colour-coded condition system for trails during poor weather and alternative routes to reach Spring Road.</li> <li>- encourage use of Spring Road as off-leash trail</li> </ul> <p><i>Long Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On hold pending outcome of Section 37 project</li> </ul>
<b>Damage to natural area adjacent to off-leash Nature trails</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-lack of education of dog owners and lack of enforcement</li> <li>- large number of parallel unofficial trails</li> <li>- improper fencing and gating material</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use brush and plant material to close off side trails and place small discrete signs indicating "Unofficial Trail – Please do not use"</li> <li>-reduce size of entrance</li> <li>- use wooden tie down stakes to prevent bottom fencing from being lifted</li> <li>- education and signage campaign at entrances/exits to explain damage caused by use of unofficial trails</li> <li>-fill in gaps in fencing along nature trails</li> </ul> <p><i>Long Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- gates on openings leading to environmentally sensitive areas</li> <li>-closure of side paths leading to environmentally sensitive areas</li> </ul>
<b>Damage to ravine adjacent to off-leash Nature trails</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improper fencing and gating material</li> <li>- entrances to ravine remain open</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use temporary signage to indicate benefits of ravines and need to leave alone</li> <li>- complete close off current ravine access with</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-open access to ravine from Spring Road</li> <li>-lack of signage and education</li> <li>- access remains open to other park users</li> </ul>	<p>temporary fencing and naturalized fencing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use fallen logs and debris to prevent access across Spring Creek where bank is not steeply sloped</li> </ul> <p><i>Long Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-complete the ravine fencing system and ban all park users from ravine slopes</li> <li>- use naturalized fencing to close off parallel trails leading to ravine along Eastern trails</li> <li>-destroy concrete weirs which provide access to ravine across Spring Creek</li> </ul>
<p><b>Damage to areas between Spring Road and Spring Creek</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increased conflict with Spring Road users, especially bicyclists</li> <li>- lack of fencing or naturalized barriers</li> <li>- need for accessible off-leash areas for disabled and senior dog-owners or during poor weather</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- promote use of side trail for dog-owners</li> <li>- use naturalized fencing to keep park users away from banks of Spring Creek</li> </ul> <p><i>Long Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- create pockets of naturalized areas with fencing similar to bird banding area</li> <li>- create gravel side road with proper drainage for dog-owners</li> <li>- work with Toronto Water during redesign of upper portion of Spring Creek</li> </ul>

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Problems and solutions for issues related to social interaction issues

<p>Conflict between users of Spring Road</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- park users unaware of presence of off-leash dogs</li> <li>- multiple users within small area</li> <li>- lack of signage</li> <li>- cyclists</li> <li>- lack of communication about large charity events</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use spray paint to mark entrances to off-leash area</li> <li>- provide advanced notification to K9 community about large events along Spring Road</li> <li>- consider speed bump or stop sign at bottom of Spring Road Hill</li> </ul> <p><i>Long Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- create parallel off-leash trail beside Spring Road</li> <li>- promote eastern and western trails for park users not comfortable around dogs</li> <li>- create large and clear entrances to off-leash area including signage</li> </ul>
<p>Dogs disturbing Dream in High Park</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lack of education in dog community</li> <li>- lack of alternative site</li> <li>- improper fencing at entrances to Dream Site</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use K9 members and Canstage staff to promote move to temporary Dog Hill</li> <li>- increase education and awareness through posting on Dog Hill</li> <li>- sandwich board containing information about rule and move off of Dog Hill</li> <li>- posting off-leash area agreement</li> <li>- promote use of off-leash trails and Spring Road during summer</li> </ul> <p><i>Long Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- create alternative Dog Hill location with lighting during summer months</li> <li>- continued education and awareness campaigns</li> <li>- seasonal signage around Dream Site promoting site and need to remain quiet</li> <li>- explore planting along fence line to decrease noise from Dog Hill</li> </ul>

Conflict between dog owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- overcrowding</li> <li>- presence of unneutered dogs in the park</li> <li>- owners unwilling to walk trails</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- encourage use of trails and Spring Road</li> <li>- provide secondary location for Dog Hill</li> <li>- promote nearby off-leash areas</li> </ul> <p><i>Long Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- provide dog education classes and seminar in conjunction with Animal Services and local trainers</li> <li>- additional local off-leash areas</li> </ul>
Conflict between dog owners and other park users outside off-leash area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lack of education</li> <li>- lack of enforcement</li> <li>- lack of sense of ownership of off-leash area by dog-owners</li> <li>-lack of a clear reporting system for minor problems</li> </ul>	<p><i>Short Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increased education and awareness campaign</li> <li>- target problem dog owners with existing enforcement mechanisms</li> <li>- promote reporting using existing HPCAC voicemail</li> </ul> <p><i>Long Term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- create sense of ownership amongst dog owners for off-leash area</li> <li>-create a High Park K9 community</li> <li>-engage and educate other park users about benefits of off-leash area</li> </ul>

While much of the solutions to the problems that exist in the off-leash area can be tackled by local volunteers and members of the HPCAC, ultimately the primary responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of the off-leash area and the entire park rests with the City of Toronto. The K9 committee remains committed to working with other HPCAC programs and park staff to help maintain the existing off-leash area but feel there needs to be a strong overall community push for an increased commitment from the City of Toronto.

## **The High Park K9 Group Mandate**

The High Park Canine (K9) committee is a sub-committee of, and reports to the High Park Community Advisory Council (HPCAC), consisting of a group of responsible dog-owners working to promote the appropriate use of High Park and the High Park off-leash area by dog-owners and their dogs.

### **Liaison**

- To provide an opportunity for input from dog owners and to promote dog-related activities at the HPCAC, with park staff as well as the City of Toronto

### **Management**

- To promote responsible dog ownership within High Park in cooperation with the broader park community

### **Educate**

- To educate dog owners and the general public about the benefits of High Park, the off-leash area and responsible dog ownership within the park

### **Stewardship**

- To help support and maintain the off-leash areas within the park

### **Socialize**

- To develop and maintain a sense of community among dog owners who utilize the off-leash trails in High Park in order to build a sense of community and social conscience among dog owners

High Park Nature Centre  
Diana Teal, Coordinator  
416-392-1748 ext. 6

#### Questions for Impact Statement

1) What is the nature and/or brief description of your group?

The Nature Centre is the key program operated by the High Park Initiatives (HPI), a registered charity founded in November 2003 to raise funds for volunteer-based programs in the park. The Nature Centre also works closely with HPI's sister organization, the High Park Community Advisory Council. The High Park Nature Centre has been operational since 1999, offering programming on a seasonal basis during the spring and summer months. In 2003, the Nature Centre became a year round outdoor environmental education facility run by two full-time staff members and a team of volunteers. We have now grown to a team of three full-time staff and one part-time staff person.

Programs are run out of the old Lawn Bowling Club House, on the eastern perimeter of the park, adjacent to the Howard Park Tennis Club complex.

#### *Our Mandate, Vision and Objectives*

The High Park Nature Centre (HPNC) is committed to the promotion of responsible stewardship of the natural environment. The Nature Centre provides an opportunity for park visitors to gain an understanding of the park's unique ecology and the importance of maintaining and restoring the area's environmental legacy.

The Nature Centre aims to offer an enriched educational experience that will have a long-term impact on individual attitudes toward the natural environment and personal lifestyles and contribute to the protection of High Park's rare and significant natural areas.

The HPNC offers discovery-based, hands-on activities focused on the natural history of High Park and the flora and fauna that inhabit the park.

#### Our programs:

- Provide an experiential introduction to local natural history for children ages 3 – 12 yrs.
- Provide an opportunity for participants to engage in park stewardship activities (i.e. ecological restoration).
- Provide children with experiences that will foster a positive environmental ethic
- Provide fun, safe and memorable experience for children

Nature Centre programs run on a year-round basis. The Orienteering program runs year round, but seems to be most popular in the fall, winter and spring.

Programs run Monday – Friday from 9:30 am – 11:30am and 12:30 – 2:30pm and on Saturdays from 9:30 – 12 noon. That said we are fully booked during some months of the year and not during other months of the year. Periods when we are fully booked are: February and March, mid-May to the end of June, July and August, October to mid-November.

Orienteering teams are usually passing through the off-leash trail between 10:30 – 11:15am and 1:30 – 2:15pm Monday to Friday. Hikes in the on-leash trails near the Nature Centre usually occur between 10:00 – 11:15 am and 1:00 – 2:15 pm from Monday to Friday and from 10:30 – 12:00 pm on Saturdays.

2) What is the impact of the off-leash area and dogs in the park on your group?

During the course of our hikes in the park, we run into many dogs off-leash in the on-leash area near the Nature Centre on the trails east of Spring Road to Parkside Drive and south of Bloor Street to the former site of the Emergency Phone on Spring Road. This is an area of the park that we spend the majority of our time in when hiking, as we are usually traveling from the Nature Centre to our planting site near the TTC loop off of Parkside and Howard Park. We have observed many dogs off leash in this on-leash area, and the owners, in many cases, are no where in sight. We have observed many owners walking on Spring Road while their dogs run loose on the trails where we are hiking with children. The dogs run up the trail north of the Emergency Phone and the owners continue to walk on the road and they meet up near the storm water retention pond or vice versa. In this situation, as the owner is not nearby, there is no one ask for the dog to be leashed or controlled.

Also in the same area of the park, we see several of the same owners walking with their dog off-leash. Some owners make excuses every time they are asked to put their dog on a leash – “I never walk my dog off leash” – even though they are asked by Nature Centre staff to leash their dog more than twice a week during busy periods. Other owners ignore us completely and let their dog continue to disrupt our program. Other owners give nothing but resistance when asked to put their dog on a leash. It is not something that we want to deal with in front of visiting students, as the tone of voice and sometimes language used by dog owners can be rather confrontational.

In this area of the park (on-leash trails near the Nature Centre) we are generally dealing with people with one or two dogs – they are obviously not dog-walkers.

Despite increased signage thanks to the KP committee and some assistance from Animal Control and City By-Law officers, **this continues to be a major problem for us in this area of the park.**

A major problem area for us is the junction of trails on the off-leash trail running north-south, northeast of Dog Hill and west of the trail coming up the hill from the north bridge on Spring Creek. We do not spend a lot of time in this area, but do travel through the

area when running our “Orienteering” program and occasionally during our “Winter Bird Watching” program.

Visiting students in small groups (5-6 children), always accompanied by an adult, need to cross the trail through the opening in the fence to go from one orienteering station to another – one orienteering marker is in the spruce trees by the compost yard and the other is on the north bridge over Spring Creek. As the off-leash trail cuts the park in half, it is not possible for us to relocate the orienteering stations (although we have tried) – it is an area of the park with the least amount of poison ivy and no unsafe trails in the winter.

When asked to either control (i.e. grab dog by the collar) or leash dogs that are particularly out of control (i.e. jumping at children, circling children), most dog walkers feel that they do not have to control their dogs because it is an off-leash area. We respect the fact that the trail is off-leash, but see no reason why we can not pass through the area with students. We know that most dogs are friendly and want to say hello, but we do have a "no-touch" rule with all students, so that no one puts themselves in a position where they may be bitten by a dog. Many children are afraid of dogs and some are not allowed to touch dogs because of religious reasons, so all we are asking is that people control their dogs - grab them by the collar for the 2 minutes if would take us to walk past. We are hoping that people will be reasonable about the situation - if a child is visibly terrified of a dog, we would hope that the dog's owner would be willing to hold onto their dog to provide the child with a sense of security. We have had several incidents with dog owners in this area, and again, the tone of voice and language is not ideal for use when children are near.

In this area of the park, we encounter a lot of people with multiple dogs, so I assume that we are dealing with dog walkers as opposed to dog owners, although we have had run-ins with people with one or two dogs. Often, the owner will be standing on the off-leash path, but the dogs will be running in the on-leash area immediately west of the trail.

This is becoming a major issue for us and I am concerned that it will affect our bookings - a few teachers have commented to me that they are not sure if they will return to the Nature Centre if there is no resolution to the dog issue. We have had two teachers bring students back to the Nature Centre after a run-in with a dog or several dogs in this area of the park that frightened the children and state that they will not return to the Nature Centre because this is a major safety issue.

From an ecological perspective, myself and the staff at the Nature Centre are concerned about the impact that off-leash dogs have in on-leash areas and in the park in general. We would be happy to assist in any way that we can to provide educational opportunities to park users with dogs – we believe that park users need the opportunity to educate themselves about the natural environment of the park and the impact that dogs and humans have on the park.

3) Do you have any suggestions for the off-leash area and dogs in the park?

Increased enforcement is imperative. The officers responsible for enforcement must be willing to leave their vehicle and venture to the on-leash trails where people frequently walk their dogs off-leash.

Increased signage is also imperative. The text on the signs needs to be much more clear – “You are now leaving an off-leash area” is not clear enough – people like to debate these signs with us all the time. “This is an on-leash area – Leash your dog now” is much better. Signs to remind people that the park is multi-use would be excellent – off-leash areas are not for off-leash dogs and their owners alone.

As I stated above, the Nature Centre would be happy to participate in a K9 event to provide educational tours for dog owners etc. I would like to take a more pro-active stance on the issue of dogs in the park rather than a critical one – I appreciate what the K9 committee has done for the Nature Centre and would like to work together to address issues that we are experiencing and observing in the park.

4) A draft version of the report will be made available prior to public release for further comment, would your group be interested in reviewing the draft report?

YES.

5) Additional comments and suggestions?



## **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

June 15, 2007

### **Impact Statement re High Park off-leash area and dogs in the park**

#### **1. About Our Group**

The Natural Environment Committee advises the City's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division on comprehensive park management, restoration and operations practices. It also builds community support for sound environmental practices, behaviors and experiences within the Park. The NEC has operated since June 1993 and reports to the High Park Community Advisory Council.

#### **2. The impact of the off-leash area and dogs in the park on our group**

Off leash dogs are having a very deleterious effect on the understory vegetation in the slopes and bottom lands of High Park and in open spaces where the native vegetation is very fragile.

This issue has been discussed at our group for many years as a matter of serious concern. We have observed increasingly negative impact on the natural areas adjacent to the current off-leash area and trails, as well as on major access routes and alternative trails used regularly by dog owners. Over the last 10-15 years, the restoration program, involving hundreds of thousands of dollars of capital funds, plus ongoing operational expense and extensive volunteer support, has yielded very encouraging improvements in natural regeneration in many areas of the park (west and north oak woodlands, tablelands north of the restaurant, some upland areas east of Spring Road). In contrast, during the same period, the off-leash area and adjacent natural areas (e.g. "Sumac Hill", the woodland trails east of Spring Road) have become seriously degraded. Fencing has been introduced to mitigate these effects, but has not proven to be sufficient to protect the natural environment.

#### **3. Suggestions for the off-leash area and dogs in the park**

We have the following suggestions:

- (a) Off leash areas should be located away from environmentally sensitive areas, including areas designated as "Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest" (ANSI). Also, off-leash areas should have clearly marked access routes that do not bring excess traffic through environmentally sensitive areas.
- (b) All off-leash areas should be fenced or have natural barriers erected to prevent off leash dogs from leaving them and to clearly define the boundaries for all park users. Entrances should be protected with special animal-control gates such as "Z" or double "L" shaped gates. The current lack of clear boundaries conveys the message that the Park is largely an off-leash area.
- (c) Long ribbon shaped off leash areas should be avoided due to the difficulty in erecting and maintaining fences.. It is our understanding that the paved portion of Spring Road (but not the

adjacent vegetation) is an off-leash trail. Experience shows that it is unrealistic to expect dog-owners to keep their dogs on the road, which will then necessitate the construction of more fencing as the Spring Creek valley undergoes restoration as planned over the next few years. Also, trails that serve the general public as major routes through the park are not suitable as off-leash trails.

- (d) Ravine slopes and waterways should not be included in off-leash areas (either formally or informally). These fragile areas provide important habitat to a variety of wildlife and cannot sustain regular dog traffic without being seriously damaged.
- (e) Rotational plantings should be considered for the Dog Hill off-leash area. The groundcover is seriously eroded and cannot sustain the level of activity. Ultimately, some restrictions on numbers of users may need to be considered if there is to be any grass at all in this area.
- (f) Once the off-leash areas are modified and defined, a very aggressive public education and signage program should be launched. Areas should be designated as off leash and on leash with a simple sign and a specification of the amount of the fine if the dog is off leash in an on leash area. The current signs are too wordy and vague and may be misinterpreted by many people. Natural areas also need to be well-signed to indicate that they are protected areas.
- (g) Enforcement must be greatly increased to raise awareness to the level that the parking enforcement unit has accomplished with respect to illegal parking or non payment of tolls. Enforcement is needed in all time periods in which dog owners visit the park, including major enforcement on weekends.
- (h) Since park space is in such great demand for a variety of purposes, compatible multiple uses should be considered. For example, the playing fields, which have an extensive turfed surface more suitable to dog traffic than the existing oak savannah site, are unused much of the time. The possibility of time/season-restricted off-leash use on these areas could be considered.
- (i) Park Operations (with support of enforcement, restoration and planning staff) need to fulfill their responsibility for maintaining the park in good repair, and should be funded adequately to be able to protect park assets. We recognize and applaud the intensive efforts that the K9 committee has made to improve signage, fencing and public education. However, we believe that ultimately the responsibility for a well-managed park, including any off-leash area, rests with the City.

#### **4. Reviewing the draft report**

Yes, we would be interested in reviewing the draft report.

#### **5. Additional comments and suggestions**

High Park is a scarce and valuable resource that is under ever-increasing pressure to meet a variety of user demands. For High Park to maintain its natural character for future generations to enjoy, some difficult decisions will need to be made.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to provide input to the review, and for all your efforts in conducting this review.

## Impact Statement: Park Watch

### DESCRIPTION OF GROUP

Park Watch are volunteers that act as goodwill ambassadors for the park. We inform park users regarding by-laws and answer any questions/directions within the park. Any issues we encounter are either reported to the park supervisor or the police.

### IMPACT

We do walk down Spring Rd. and through Dog Hill and there is really no impact on our group in the off-leash area. In the on-leash area, we watch to make sure dogs are managed properly, but have stopped advising people with dogs off-leash about the two areas. There doesn't seem to be any impact on doing this and there are a lot more dogs in the park.

### SUGGESTIONS

In the off-leash area I would like to see the big trees protected i.e. a small fence around the base of the tree to protect the root system. Otherwise there is nothing more.

In the on-leash areas, I believe enforcement is the only solution to solve free running dogs. Also the dollar amount could be mentioned for the fine if anyone is approached about their dog being off-leash.

### ADDNTL. COMMENTS

When are the surveys being done to monitor dog users in the park?

Gloria

## Impact Statement-VSP

1. What is the nature and/or brief description of your group?

The Volunteer Stewardship Program works with the City of Toronto urban forestry and restoration crew to help to maintain and enhance the Black Oak savannah in High Park. We run events year-round that involve planting, weeding and general maintenance of native plants, as well as educate and involve the public.

2. What is the impact of the off-leash area and dogs in the park on your group?

The off-leash area has no impact on our group, as we focus more on the natural areas of the park. Dogs in the park in general can be destructive if they are not on leashes. We devote a lot of time to helping savannah plants to flourish and it gets frustrating when dog owners let their dogs run free through areas that are carefully being monitored and cared for by the VSP.

3. Do you have any suggestions for the off-leash area and dogs in the park?

We would be happy to see that dogs are on leashes outside of the off-leash area.

4. A draft version of the report will be made available prior to public release for further comment, would your group be interested in reviewing the draft report?

Yes, please

5. Additional comments and suggestions?

We recognize that the park is an important recreation space for people in the neighbourhood and that dogs are part of people's families. We would like to help strike a balance between recreational use and environmental sustainability.