

SALTY DOGS? BEACH ACCESS PUSHED

Bill would allow pooches to play in state parks

BY ROBERT BRODSKY
robert.brodsky@newsday.com

Long Islanders may soon be able to stroll along the sand at Jones Beach or near the shore at Montauk Point State Park with their four-legged best friends.

Proposed legislation moving through the State Senate and Assembly would allow dogs access to all New York State parks, including beaches, with the exception of Adirondack and Catskill parks. Currently, pooches are banned, with limited exceptions, from state beaches, boardwalks, playgrounds, buildings, golf courses, pools and spray pads.

"It's really frustrating," said Ginny Munger Kahn of Dix Hills, who serves as president of the Long Island Dog Owners Group, a nonprofit that has lobbied for years to lift the ban. "We are taxpayers and our money supports public parks. And yet the New York State Office of Parks bans dogs completely from all beaches and from all shoreline access. It's just not right to deny access to so much public land to so many people."

14,000 acres of shore

In total, the state manages about 14,000 acres of Long Island parks with shoreline access, according to Kahn, a retired financial journalist who owns two golden retrievers, Sophie and Cody.



Ginny Munger Kahn of LI Dog Owners Group with her golden retrievers Sophie, left, and Cody, in Manhattan's Central Park.

Working with elected officials, LI-DOG has created 10 dog parks and dozens of on-leash walking trails since its formation in 1998, she said.

Meanwhile, an online petition, posted by the group in 2021, to allow dogs on state beaches now has more than 6,500 signatures.

MaryFlorence Brennan of Northport said she's anxious to bring her golden retriever Finn to the beaches at Sunken Meadow or Robert Moses state park.

"The beach is a very special place to us," she said. "And there's nothing more wonderful than being on the beach with your dog."

The legislation, sponsored by State Sen. Monica Martinez (D-Brentwood) and Assemb. Steve Stern (D-Dix Hills), would require dogs to be up to date on their vaccinations and on a leash at all times, with the exception of the new dog run at Belmont Lake State Park.

Dogs would be restricted from within 100 feet of areas with sensitive or endangered wildlife, such as piping plovers and snowy owls, and in areas where people are swimming or sunbathing.

So don't expect to bring Fido to the busy East Bathhouse at Jones Beach this July Fourth weekend.

But Kahn insists there are

WHAT TO KNOW

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- **Proponents argue that as taxpayers, they should be able to enjoy state parks with their dogs.**

- **But dogs are prohibited due to several concerns, including safety risks for staff and visitors, complaints about uncontrolled or barking dogs, dog waste and pets that have harassed native wildlife, according to a state parks spokesman.**

plenty of other parts of the white sandy shoreline at Jones Beach that are not regularly used by swimmers that would be perfect for dog access.

"There are plenty of little bay beaches that face onto the Great South Bay where nobody swims, so we wouldn't be displacing anybody," she said.

Concerns about waste, birds

The state parks commissioner would have the authority to set specific guidelines for individual beaches and parks, Martinez said.

"We should allow our patrons that own dogs to enjoy the beautiful parks that we have in the state of New York,"

Martinez said. "Many of them don't visit our parks because dogs are not allowed on state property. And this would allow them to do so."

A state parks spokesman declined to comment on the legislation but said dogs are prohibited from Long Island beaches due to numerous management issues. They include safety risks for staff and visitors, complaints about uncontrolled or barking dogs, dog waste and pets that have harassed native wildlife such as migratory and endangered birds.

Currently, Belmont Lake, Camp Hero, Sunken Meadow, Heckscher, Hempstead Lake, Hither Hills, Montauk Point and Napeague state parks all have trails or other areas where leashed dogs are permitted.

Suffolk County's Mud Creek County Park allows dogs to roam off the leash, while the ocean beaches at Fire Island National Seashore restrict pet access only from March 15 through Labor Day.

The proposed legislation would require owners to pick up after the dogs — the state would install waste stations with biodegradable bags and garbage cans — and they would be responsible for any damage caused by their pup. Fines would be issued for violations and pets could be prohibited from future access for lack of compliance, the legislation states.

"All of us should have every opportunity to enjoy a day at the beach with our pets," said Stern, who, as a Suffolk legislator in 2007, introduced legislation that established five dog parks throughout the county. "It's an important part of our quality of life."