

PET CITY

Why Can't More Dogs Go to the Beach?

Some towns place parks on or near the shoreline, or offer dog-friendly hours.

By JEN A. MILLER

It seems as if dogs and the beach should go hand in hand: There's so much to smell and roll around in and so much space for running, swimming and playing catch. (You could say the same of people.) And when it comes to precious beach time, it's usually the people and their rules that take priority over what dogs and their loyal owners would prefer.

That said, dog-friendly beach options seem to be on the rise. Many New Jersey and New York beach towns are turning over blocks of beaches to dogs, or at least creating dog-friendly beach hours. More hotels, motels and vacation rentals are allowing beachgoers to bring their pets, too.

It makes financial sense, said Pete Byron, a city commissioner in Wildwood, N.J. There are 89.7 million dogs in American households, and billions of dollars are spent every year on them, according to the American Pet Products Association. So the demand is there. Wildwood, for example, opened a fenced-in dog park in 2014. It became so popular that officials decided to move it and expand its reach to the ocean by mid-July.

The Wildwood dog beach has helped convert day-trippers "who had to come down and go back the same day because they had to get back to their pet," Mr. Byron said, into "multiday-trippers," which means more revenue for the community.

In Manasquan, N.J., park commissioners tried to ban dogs on the beach from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. after \$1.1 million in improvements had been made to the Fisherman's Cove Conservation Area, a popular beach spot that is part of the Monmouth County Park



TOM BRENNER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

There are summer hours for dogs at Eighth Avenue beach in Asbury Park, N.J.

System. The backlash was so great that the commissioners relented by opening part of the inlet to dogs.

And in Asbury Park, N.J., there is a public-private solution. Dogs are allowed on the town's Eighth Avenue beach from 6 p.m. to 8:30 a.m. in the summer. There's even a place for them (and their owners) to drink. The Wonder Bar held its first weekly "Yappy Hour" in 2005 in a small fenced-in area next to the building, said Debbie DeLisa, a Wonder Bar manager and director of the event. The summer yappy hour now takes place in a fenced-in, 5,000-square-foot sandy outdoor area a block from the beach. About 300 dogs attend a night, Ms. DeLisa said.

The puppy love isn't universal in the state, though. In 2016, the Sea Bright City Council rejected a proposed rule change that would allow dogs on select beaches in the early morning hours throughout the summer.

"Part of living in Sea Bright for a lot of people is being able to walk your dog on the beach," said Charles Rooney, a borough

council member. But "if you let these dogs on the beach in the summer, some people don't do the right thing and they leave number two behind."

Sea Bright's packed beaches during the summer months are simply too difficult to monitor, Mr. Rooney said. "Most people do the right thing and others don't and they mess it up for everyone else."

Laws, for the most part, still lean toward norms from the mid-20th century, and view dogs as property, not companions, said Kim Kavin, author of "The Dog Merchants: Inside the Big Business of Breeders, Pet Stores and Rescuers."

"It's history banging up against current culture," Ms. Kavin said. "It's law banging up against our feelings for our dogs today."

But some laws are slowly changing. Since 2009, East Patchogue, N.Y., has offered the Mud Creek County Park as an off-leash beach park for dogs. Ginny Munger Kahn, president of the nonprofit Long Island Dog Owners Group, said Mud Creek was a result of the dog owners group lobbying for legislation, which passed in 2007, that would require Suffolk County to create five new dog parks (Mud Creek is the only beach park). The group continues to lobby the New York State Office of Parks to allow dog access to some New York State beaches in the off-season.

They've been unsuccessful so far, but Ms. Munger Kahn is hopeful. When the nonprofit formed in 1998, "there was virtually no place you could let your dog run off-leash on Long Island," she said. Now Suffolk County has 17 off-leash dog parks.

Laws and regulations as to where dogs can and can't go will keep changing, as will the desires of dog owners, and their willingness to fight for change, Ms. Kavin said. "When you're putting that much thought to bring something into your life for 10 to 15 years, you are going to care if you can take the dog to the beach."