

Efforts by nonprofit DOGPAW have raised number of Clark County off-leash dog parks to four



Photo by [Zachary Kaufman](#)

DOGPAW board member Arleen Chester, left, greets her dogs Arliss, left, and Annabelle, while DOGPAW President Kathleen Hansen looks on at Brush Prairie Off-Leash Area.

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Kathleen Hansen President of DOGPAW



By Zachary Kaufman

The Columbian

Airedale terrier Annabelle, left, and blue Weimaraner Arliss enjoy a sunny day at Brush Prairie Off-Leash Area. The dog park, which opened in November 2008, was Clark County's third official off-leash area. A fourth, in Washougal, opened in October.

DOGPAW

DOGPAW operates four dog parks in Clark County. It's an all-volunteer nonprofit organization supported by members. Membership costs \$15 per year for individuals, or \$25 for families. To learn more about DOGPAW, go to <http://www.clarkdogpaw.org>.

If you go

- **What:** Dog Days of Summer, a grand-opening celebration for Stevenson Off-Leash Area and DOGPAW fundraiser. The event will feature activities including lure coursing and an adoptable dog fashion show.
- **When:** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 5. There will be a dog costume contest at 10:30 a.m. and dog Olympics at 11.
- **Where:** Stevenson Off-Leash Area, 32nd and Addy streets in Washougal next to Bi-Mart.

- **Cost:** Free. A donation of wet or dry pet food for AniMeals is requested. The lure course costs \$4 for DOGPAW members, and \$5 for nonmembers.

- **Information:** <http://www.clarkdogpaw.org>, 888-899-0025.

The dog days of summer are drawing near, and thanks to volunteers such as Kathleen Hansen, pooches and their owners have more places than ever to frolic and socialize. If she gets her way, those options will expand even further.

Five years ago, off-leash areas for Clark County's four-legged residents were limited to one official park just south of Hazel Dell and an unofficial park on what is now Pacific Community Park in east Vancouver. This summer, dogs can enjoy four off-leash parks scattered throughout the county. The latest one, Stevenson Off-Leash Area in Washougal, will have its grand-opening celebration June 5.

The expansion in dog parks is due largely to the efforts of volunteers such as Hansen with the nonprofit Dog Owners Group for Park Access in Washington and their partnerships with city and county governments.

Not satisfied with four parks, DOGPAW has plans for more in the works.

"We're really trying to have enough parks spread out that you don't have to travel very far from your house to go to a park," said Hansen, DOGPAW president.

The commute that Hansen, a Battle Ground resident, and her keeshond Sidney took to dog parks was reduced by about 20 minutes each way since Brush Prairie Off-Leash Area opened in November 2008.

Now more than ever, pets, who are almost like children for some people, need convenient access to open spaces to play with their owners, Hansen said.

"People and their dogs have become a little sedentary and a little chubby. They need space to move around," she said.

The Brush Prairie park near the Center for Agriculture, Science and Environmental Education is one such place. It's on a quiet street and is bordered by a forested area. On a clear day, visitors can see Mount Hood. The sound of chirping birds mixes with the occasional dog bark and the noise of pups scampering through culverts set up as play equipment.

It's a 7.5-acre park, 1 acre of which is set aside for small or shy dogs. Like all DOGPAW parks, it's surrounded by a 4-foot fence and has double-gated entrances to help prevent escapes.

It's similar in layout to Stevenson Off-Leash Area, which opened in October and is named after the family who owns the land. The city of Washougal leases the land from the Stevensons for \$1 per month. The city paid to clean up the site, purchased the building materials and handles the

mowing and waste removal. DOGPAW volunteers provided the labor to build the park, and they help with management and maintenance.

DOGPAW, with about 650 members, has years of experience funding, building and running parks. The group got its start with Ross Off-Leash Dog Recreation Area, an 8-acre park on the Bonneville Power Administration's Ross Complex that opened in summer of 2005.

DOGPAW has made some changes to Ross since the park opened. In 2008, the group designated about one-third of an acre for dogs less than 25 pounds. A couple of months ago, Mark Heiny, DOGPAW board member and construction manager, started organizing occasional lure coursing at Ross. At these events, a toy is attached to a mechanized pulley for dogs to chase.

"It's extremely popular," said Heiny, an east Vancouver resident. "We're starting to get a lot of regulars. The dogs love it."

Ross is the county's second-busiest park, following on the heels of Dakota Memorial Off-Leash Area. Dakota opened in summer 2008 in Pacific Community Park and is named after a Vancouver police dog killed in the line of duty. It was the county's first publicly funded dog park, although DOGPAW helps manage and maintain it.

The Dakota park offers amenities such as running water and bathrooms that the others do not. DOGPAW hopes to restore water to Ross and add a water source at Stevenson as funding allows.

For all its frills, though, Dakota is the only Clark County dog park without a place for small dogs to play away from bigger, stronger breeds. However, that's soon to change.

Members expressed interest in adding a designated small-dog space at Dakota, so DOGPAW started a special fund to pay for the building materials. One donor recently came forward with the \$2,000 needed, and Heiny said he'll begin construction in June. He hopes to complete the small dog area, which will measure about 100 feet by 50 feet, in July.

How long projects such as this take depends largely on volunteer involvement, Hansen said. DOGPAW is trying to grow its membership to increase its manpower and also its budget — member dues are the group's main source of funding.

Four additional park options are being explored that will require both time and money. DOGPAW is looking at a site in Camas west of Goot Park on BPA property, one near Vancouver Lake Park, one by Fairgrounds Community Park in Ridgefield and one at Hockinson Meadows Community Park.

Which park comes to fruition first depends upon negotiations with the county and respective cities, and what resources those government partners have to contribute to building and maintaining the parks, Hansen said.

The Camas site is looking most promising right now, Hansen said, because there's already adequate street-side parking. There are some concerns about the space available by Fairgrounds

Community Park, though. DOGPAW would be able to use only about 3 acres for an off-leash area, which is less than half the size of its other dog parks.

The goal eventually is to have six to eight off-leash areas in Clark County, Heiny said, and they'll come at a price. Each DOGPAW park costs \$12,000 to \$15,000 in materials to build and requires willing volunteer laborers, Hansen said. The effort, though, is well worth it.

“If you can go to a dog park and it's large enough, you can have spaces where you can walk on trails, play on toys, throw a Frisbee,” Hansen said. “There's space to move around. The people and their dogs get to be active and social.”

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<http://www.clarkdogpaw.org>