

Game Refuge Enacts New Dog Policy

By Connor Hogan
Special to Today Magazine

Connor Hogan is the director of the McLean Game Refuge, a wildlife sanctuary located mostly in Granby and Simsbury with a smaller section in Canton

The Game Refuge was established in 1932 by George P. McLean, the renowned senator and governor of Connecticut who was born in Simsbury

THE MCLEAN Game Refuge has enacted a new dog recreation policy in order to ensure adherence to the will of George McLean.

Beginning June 1, three miles of trails that stretch between County Road and Firetown Road will no longer be open to dogs at any time. The trails included in this closure are Firetown Trail, Knollside Trail, Spur Trail and South Trail — 10% of the trail system.

The closure of these four trails to dogs is an initial step toward addressing the problem of dogs at the Game Refuge and improving wildlife safety and peaceful recreation for visitors.

Dogs no longer allowed on certain trails

These trails were selected for closure to dogs because of their history of dog-bear conflict, their high wildlife density (including ground-nesting hermit thrushes) and their lower visitor population than many other trails.

Game Refuge staff will monitor recreation on these trails and strictly enforce the banning of dogs with the help of local animal control officers.

McLean's trustees have decided to restrict access to dogs at the Game Refuge after years of issues with dogs — especially off-leash dogs. The trustees have concluded that the presence of dogs at the Game Refuge has, at times, been inconsistent with the management mandates in Sen. McLean's will.

Specifically, dogs have prevented the managers of the Game Refuge from protecting our wild animals and have also prevented visitors from finding peace in nature.

The biggest struggle with dogs is that many people disregard our leash requirement and allow their dogs to roam freely on our trails and in our forests.

VALLEY INTEL

We conducted an extensive visitor-use analysis in 2020 and discovered that nearly 50% of dog owners allowed them off-leash within the Game Refuge.

During a typical year, we have experienced about 3000 off-leash dog incidents. During the huge volume of visitors in 2020, we estimate that dogs ran off-leash more than 7000 times.

These off-leash dogs can have serious consequences for our wildlife.

Our staff have witnessed countless incidents of dogs chasing squirrels, rabbits, woodchucks, deer, bears and waterfowl. Some of these incidents were even encouraged by their owners.

We have also seen dogs dig up chipmunk burrows, buried turtle eggs and the nests of ground-nesting birds — disrupting their nesting, hunting, breeding and young-rearing.

This can pose short and long-term challenges for these wildlife populations. Even leashed dogs can negatively impact

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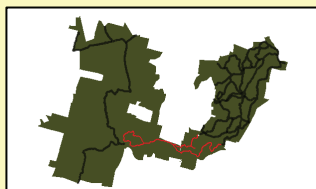
Trails Closed to Dogs

McLean Game Refuge



Trails Included:

Firetown Trail
Knollside Trail
Spur Trail
South Trail



0 2.5 5 Miles
CT State Plane NAD83 (feet)

Service Layer Credits: Source: Esri, Maxar, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

— Trails Closed to Dogs
— Other Hiking Trails
— Main Roads
 Game Refuge Boundary

DOGS — continued from page 11

wildlife. At least twice in recent years leashed dogs have harassed and chased bears, resulting in injury to the dog (and possibly the bear).

One dog-bear incident led to the injury of the dog owner when he tried to pull his dog away from the bear. Other animals, especially birds, can suffer by the mere presence of dogs.

Abundant research worldwide has shown that animals exposed to dogs develop stress responses — which can lead to health deterioration, breeding failure, etc. — and eventually leave areas frequented by dogs.

People are also negatively affected by dogs. Sen. McLean expressed in his will that the Game Refuge must be a place where people can find a “peace of mind and body” — yet we have repeatedly found that dogs prevent visitors from realizing that peace.

Unleashed dogs regularly follow and jump up on other hikers. While this may be playful, it is certainly not universally appreciated.

Some dogs bark at and menace hikers. This may be the case even if they are leashed.

Some of our visitors are survivors of dog attacks and experience serious anxiety around dogs, especially uncontrolled dogs. Recreation at the Game Refuge is not designed to be dependent upon a visitor’s comfort with dogs.

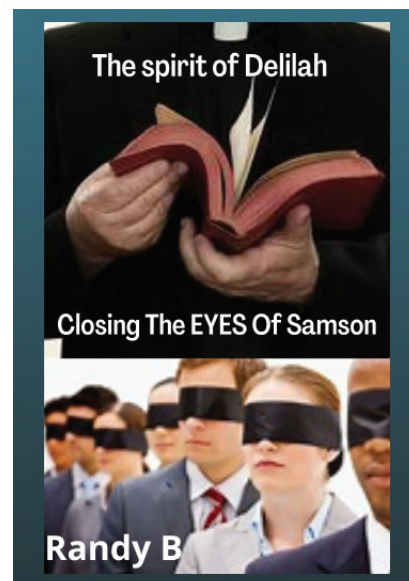
If dog issues remain a problem, McLean’s trustees may decide to enact further limits.

New signage will be installed on the affected trails and at primary parking areas to notify visitors of this change.

Thank you in advance for your support of this important new policy at the McLean Game Refuge. +

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