

2018 Ranger Report

Town of Concord

Division of Natural Resources

The Town of Concord Ranger program was reinstated in 2015 to educate the public around swimming regulations and rule compliance at White Pond. Rangers are in place to relay Town goals and initiatives to the public, remove invasive plants from conservation land, and implement and enforce Town rules and regulations. In the summer of 2017, Rangers patrolled White Pond and enforced the no swimming policy that has been in place at the property for many years. Additionally, Rangers responsibilities were expanded to patrolling other conservation lands to better understand how visitors enjoy these properties. Rangers collected land usage data on whether or not dogs were present, whether they were on or off leash, the number of dogs at various properties, and the quantities and locations of dog waste on the trails. In addition to previous responsibilities, the 2018 Rangers were responsible for informing the public of and enforcing new dog walking regulations enacted by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) over the winter.

Dog Walking Regulations and Visitor Statistics:

With increased presence of dogs on Town conservation lands, the NRC evaluated their existing policies on dog rules and regulations last year. They researched municipal, state, federal, and private land managers approaches to dogs on conservation land, developed a Natural Resources Values report for popular conservation lands with trails, interviewed the Animal Control Officer, and solicited input from the Agriculture Committee, dog trainers, and the public at large. On December 20th 2017, the Natural Resources Commission adopted new dog walking regulations for Punkatasset Preserve. In February, 2018, the NRC adopted new leash restrictions at food-producing agricultural lands. The majority of Concord conservation land continues to be available to off-leash dogs, under effective voice control, while only 28% of trails require owners to walk their dogs on leash. Dogs must be leashed at all times at Punkatasset Preserve, White Pond Reservation, and food-producing agricultural fields, as well

as seasonally at Mattison Field (April 1st through July 31st), to ensure the protection of breeding and ground-nesting bobolinks. The main reasoning behind these regulations is to foster a community where everyone feels welcome to share the trails and safeguard conservation lands from potential harm. Rangers collected and analyzed a variety of data which is summarized in this report. All data was collected daily between 10:30am – 7:00pm from May 23rd to August 17th, 2018.

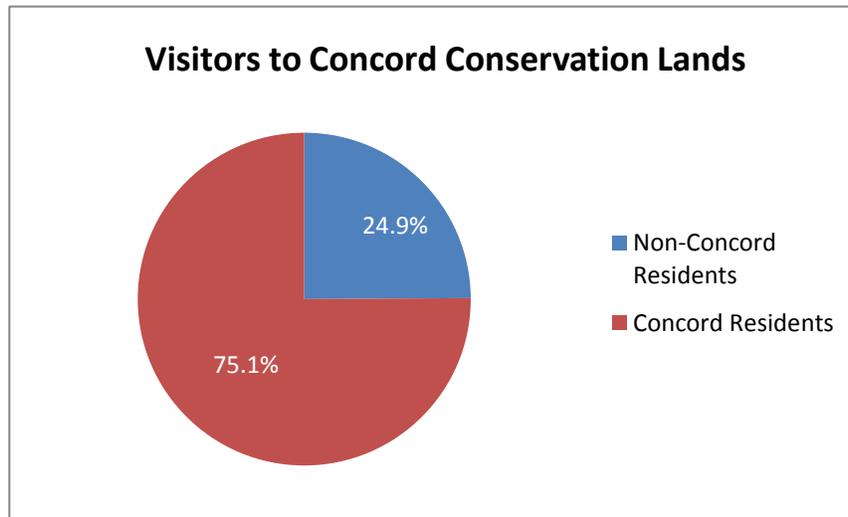


Figure 1: Conservation Land Attendance by Concord Residents vs. Non-Concord Residents

As displayed above in Figure 1, the majority of trail goers to Concord conservation lands are residents of the town of Concord. The 25% of out of town visitors mainly consisted of people from Acton, Carlisle, Maynard, Sudbury and other nearby towns. Naturally, the trails saw the most use by Concord and non-Concord residents on weekends and were mainly only used by Concord residents during regular weekdays.

Figure 2 (below), shows the weekly attendance observed by Rangers at all of the Concord conservation lands. This data only depicts attendance when Rangers were present and collecting statistics at specific properties, so actual attendance figures are likely much higher. However, Figure 2 displays the rate at which people visited Town Conservation Land properties. June was by far the most popular month at over 80 percent more visitors, including hikers, dog walkers, swimmers and anglers, than any other month this summer.

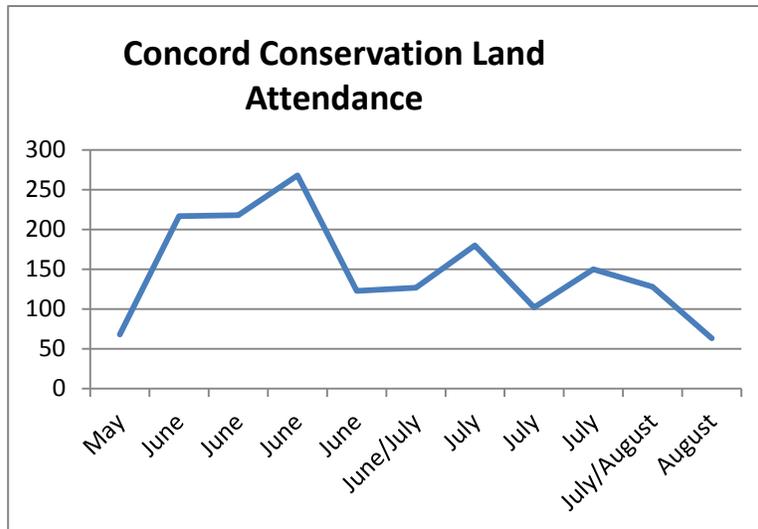


Figure 2: Approximate Concord Conservation Land Attendance (May 23 –August 17)

Leash Required Lands:

Under the Natural Resources Commission’s dog walking regulations, Punkatasset Preserve, White Pond Reservation, food-producing agricultural lands, and Mattison Field (seasonal) are all subject to leash requirements. Figure 3 (below), represents a cumulative chart measuring the rate of compliance leash-required properties. In the last week of May, compliance with the leashing policies slightly more than half. Only 56 percent of dog owners were walking their dogs on leash where required. However, this has taken a gradual trend upwards, finishing off the summer at an all-time high rate of compliance of nearly 80 percent. Many of the individuals who aren’t leashing dogs are either from out of town or are repeat offenders resisting new leashing policies.

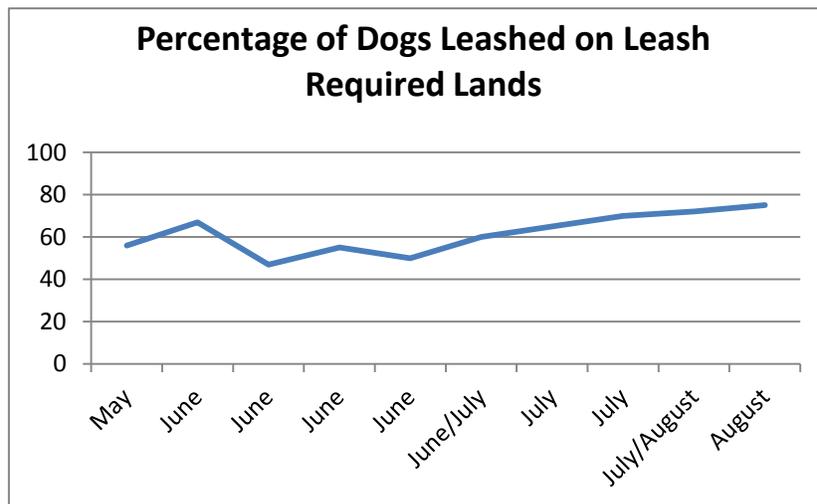


Figure 3: Percentage of Dogs Leashed at Punkatasset, White Pond, Mattison Field (seasonal), Barrett’s Mill and Rodgers Land

Punkatasset Preserve

Punkatasset Preserve is one of the more popular conservation land locations managed by the Natural Resources Commission. With large groups of people stopping by this mosaic of trails every day, Punkatasset’s visitors come from a wide array of demographics and range from hikers and birdwatchers to bikers and dog walkers. Dog regulations were enacted at this property by the NRC due to Punkatasset’s high land value as well as its substantial wildlife and habitat diversity, and because Estabrook Woods, of which Punkatasset forms a part, was intended to be protected as a Nature Preserve. Estabrook Woods is recognized by the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife as a “significant wildlife area due to its habitat diversity and area size”. In addition to these factors, there has also been a recent history of off-trail dogs being bitten by coyotes that were protecting young.

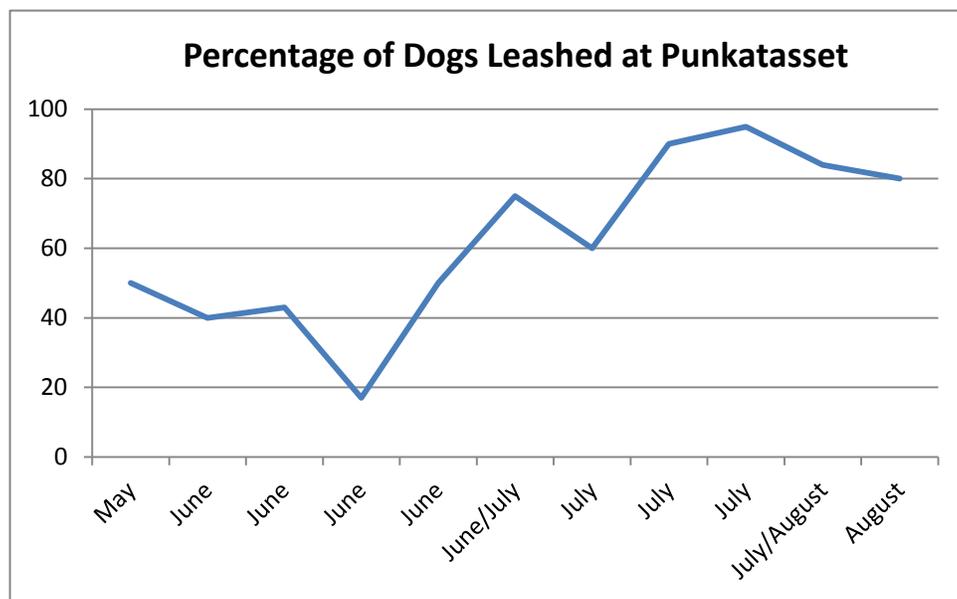


Figure 4: Percentage of Dogs Leashed at Punkatasset during summer months of 2018

The chart above displays the percentage of dogs being leashed at Punkatasset Preserve during the summer months of this year. As the data demonstrate, the new leash policies have steadily gained more compliance and support as the summer progressed. At the end of May, data showed that only 50 percent of dog walkers at Punkatasset were leashing their dogs. This percentage soon dropped even further to under 20 percent in mid-June. However, as the public was made more aware of these new regulations, as well as the reasons behind them, the proportion of dog walkers leashing their dogs at Punkatasset has taken a continuous trend

upwards with near perfect compliance by the end of July. This dipped off slightly in August, finishing the summer at a compliance rate of 80 percent, a 30 percent improvement since data was first collected in May.

The most frequent violators of the leash policies at Punkatasset were generally dog walkers from out of town. However, once they had been informed of the new regulations, visitors often leashed their dogs and continued their walk. Naturally, there were those who were disappointed or even angered by these new leashing policies. When dog walkers voiced their disagreements, Rangers often suggested that visit other off-leash properties. Conversely, there were numerous people who expressed happiness and gratitude regarding the new leash regulations. Positive feedback was often given from those who were frightened of dogs, stating they felt much safer on the trails with these policies in place. Additionally, those whose dogs were nervous around other dogs often stated that they were much more comfortable on the trails with the new leash policies. Throughout the three months data was taken, no fines or courtesy tags were issued at Punkatasset Preserve. The police were contacted once due to aggressive behavior and disorderly conduct.

Mattison Field

Mattison Field, another popular dog walking location, is Concord's only seasonal leash required conservation land. Leashing one's dog is mandatory from April 1st through July 31st.

This regulation is attributed to the protection of the bobolink, whose habitat consists of overgrown grasslands, pastures, fields and meadows, making Mattison Field the ideal location to spend their breeding season. There were two pairs of bobolinks observed by Rangers and a local bird watching club in June. This scenic set of trails offers both short and long walks and is mainly used by dog walkers, hikers, and birdwatchers.

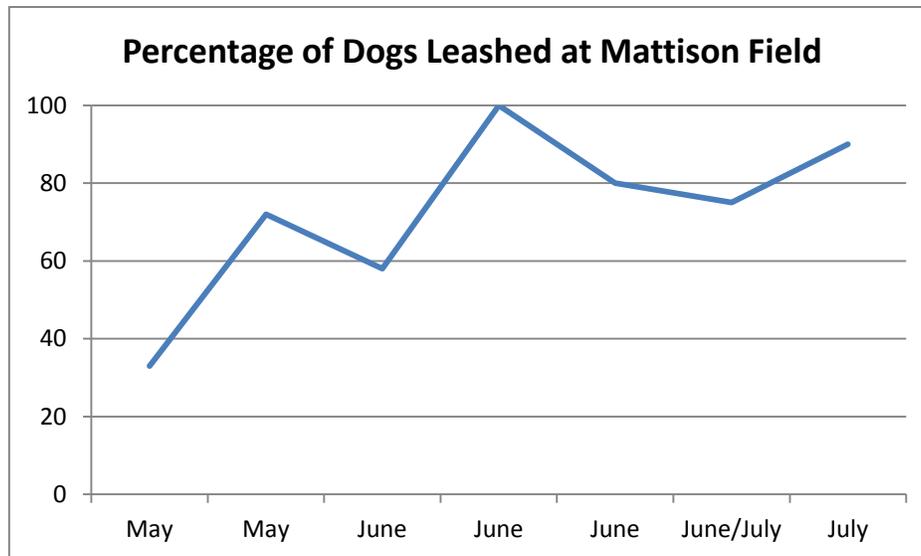


Figure 5: Percentage of Dogs Leashed at Mattison Field from May 23 – July 31

As displayed in Figure 5 above, few visitors were paying courtesy to or following the posted signs requesting that they leash their dogs during the month of May. In fact, over 77 percent of observed dog walkers were walking their dogs off-leash. As some off-leash dogs do not stay on the mowed trails, this may have caused harm and disruption to ground nesting bobolink. However, with the help of daily reminders and requests, dog owners quickly adapted and began to walk their dogs on leash. Within one week, cooperation with leashing policies doubled and within four weeks it reached 100 percent. Compliance with the leashing policies held steady from mid-June through the end of July, never dipping below 75 percent. After the bobolink breeding season came to an end on July 31st, the leash restriction was lifted at Mattison Field. Throughout the first few weeks of August, numerous regular dog walkers began to walk their dogs off-leash and under effective control. This change in behavior indicated that many visitors of Mattison Field had respect for the bobolink seasonal leash restriction while it was in place.

White Pond

White Pond Reservation attracts the most out of town visitors out of any conservation land observed by the Rangers. The pond’s visitors come to swim, fish, hike, relax, and walk dogs. White Pond has an abundance of wildlife diversity. It is home to animals such as deer, fox, coyote, raccoon, red and grey squirrel, chipmunk, and skunk. Reptiles including northern water snakes, painted turtles, frogs, and salamanders have also found their home at the Pond. Woodland and aquatic birds are often seen at the pond as well. This summer, birdwatchers

have reported sighting herons, mallard ducks, cormorants, osprey, great horned owls, barred owls, red-tailed hawks, at least one and possibly a pair of bald eagles, and many others. The water itself holds small and largemouth bass, brown, rainbow, lake, brook and tiger trout (stocked by the state twice annually), bluegill and yellow perch. The Division of Natural Resources has taken an active role in protecting the many habitats of animals that live in the White Pond Reservation, as well as protecting the water quality of the pond itself. Several badly eroded areas along the shoreline were protected by fencing and cables to close heavily eroded areas and trails and coir logs have been set along the shore to stop excess nutrients from running into the pond. In addition to these erosion control measures, various regulations have been put into place including no swimming from the conservation land, no biking on the trails, and a requirement for owners to keep their dogs on leash at all times. Division staff anticipates the long-term slope restoration at Sachem’s Cover will be undertaken this fall.

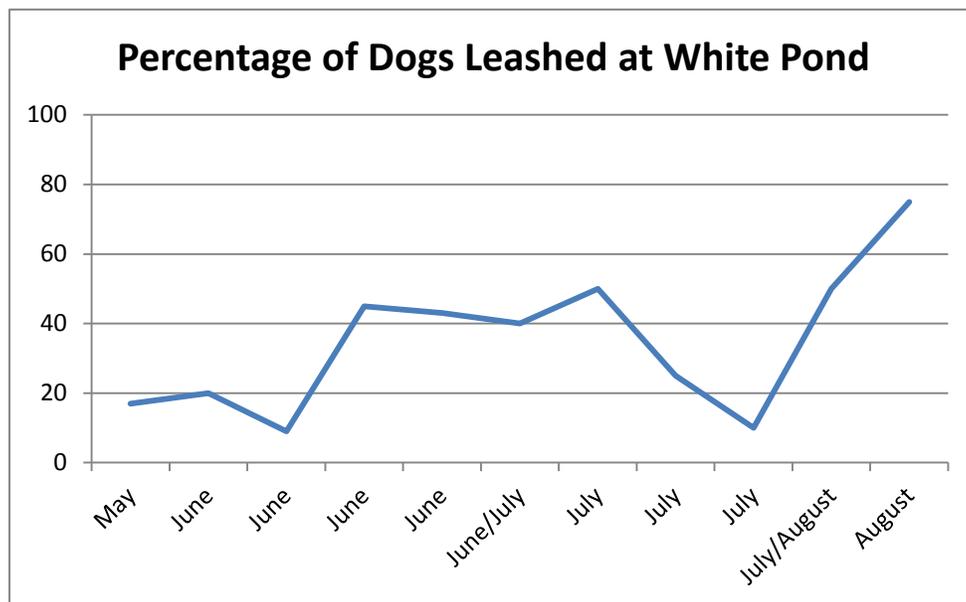


Figure 6: Percentage of Dogs Leashed at White Pond during summer months of 2018

The majority of leash required lands had an average compliance rate for the summer of nearly 75 percent; however, visitors at White Pond averaged under 40 percent compliance. This may be attributed to the fact that there are many more out of town visitors that come to White Pond reservation in comparison with other leash required conservation lands. Many non-Concord residents are unaware of leash restrictions when they first visit White Pond

Reservation. Conversely, while compliance rates were much lower at White Pond, the number of people who walked their dogs on leash increased by 57 percent by the end of the summer.

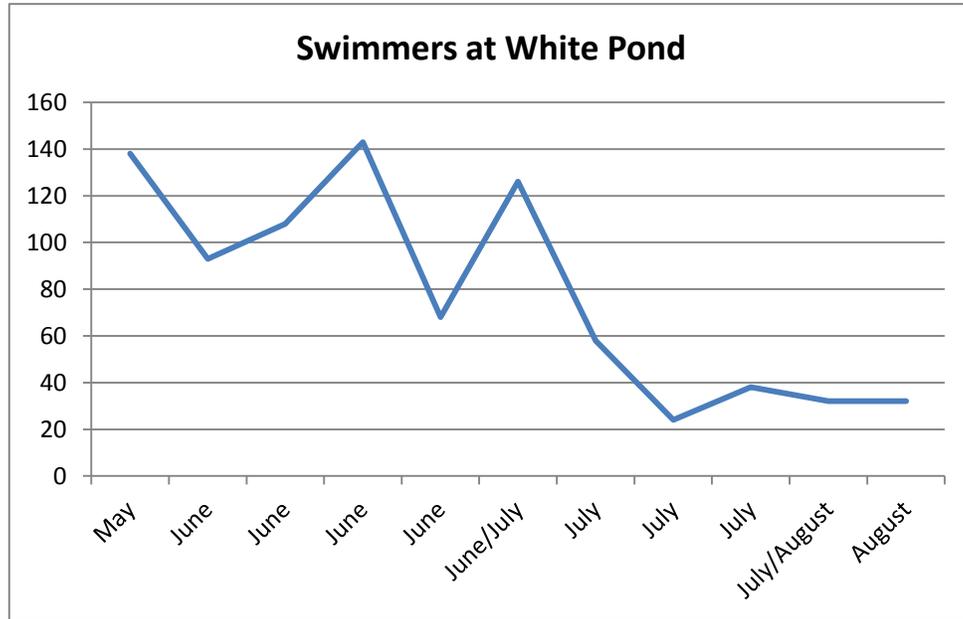


Figure 7: Swimmers at White Pond during the summer months of 2018

White Pond frequently sees visitors who come to the pond with the intention to swim. The graph above displays swimmers who visited White Pond during various daylight hours during the summer months of 2018. Nearly 70 percent of these visitors were non-Concord residents. By August, individuals who came to swim at the pond fell by over 60 percent. There were a total of 7 courtesy tags distributed to non-compliant swimmers at White Pond and one issued for a dog walker.

Agriculture and Food Producing Conservation Lands:

Barrett's Mill

Barrett's Mill Conservation Area is a historic property and active food-producing agricultural conservation land. Under the new policies adopted by the Natural Resources Commission, dog walkers must keep their dogs on leash at all times in order to help farmers comply with new food safety regulations and to keep dogs from trampling crop seedlings. Barrett's Mill Conservation Area offers several trails, including a 15-20 minute loop around a

farmed field that currently holds crops including strawberries, asparagus, tomatoes, and other vegetables and flowers. The vast majority of visitors to this property are Concord residents and dog walkers, who make good use of the short loop trail. As seen in Figure 8 below, Barrett’s Mill conservation area had an exceptional compliance rate regarding leashing regulations. Over 90 percent of the property’s visitors followed regulations and leashed their dogs when walking on the trails. No courtesy tags or fines were issued and the police were never called at Barrett’s Mill.

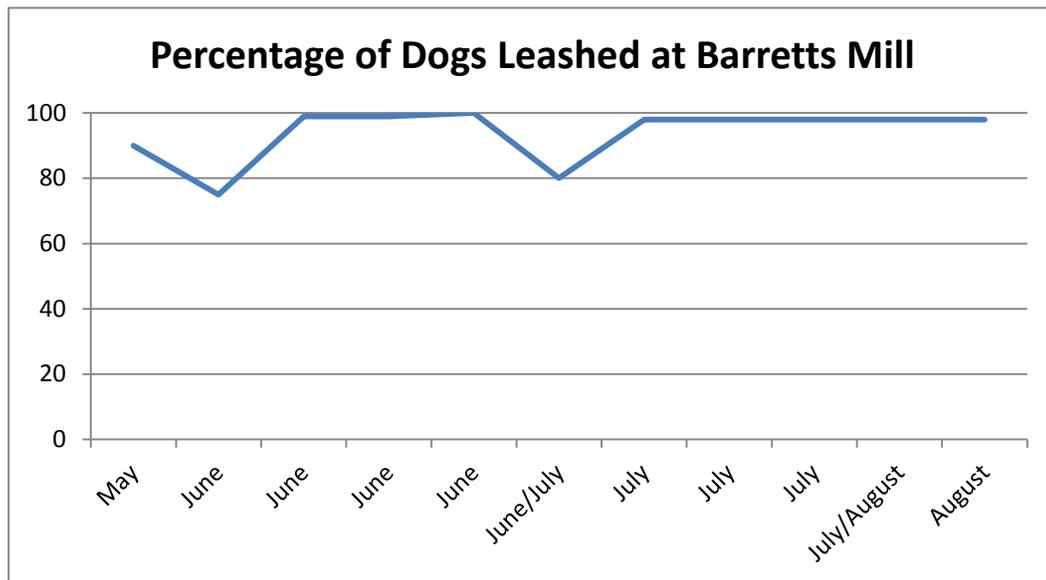


Figure 8: Percentage of Dogs leashed at Barrett’s Mill during the summer months of 2018

Rogers Land

Rogers land, another food-producing agricultural conservation land, has the same regulations as Barrett’s Mill. All observed Rogers Land dog walkers were walking their dogs on leash throughout the entirety of the summer, at a compliance rate of 100 percent. This is mainly due to the fact that there are many fewer visitors to Rogers Land in comparison with other on-leash conservation lands.

Off-Leash Lands:

Concord’s off leash lands make up 72% of the town’s accessible conservation land. This includes properties such as: Annursnac, Baptist Brook, Hapgood Wright Town Forest, October Farm Riverfront, Old Rifle Range, and West Concord Park. The most popular of these properties are Hapgood Wright Town Forest, October Farm Riverfront, and the Old Rifle Range, which each see numerous dog walkers every day.

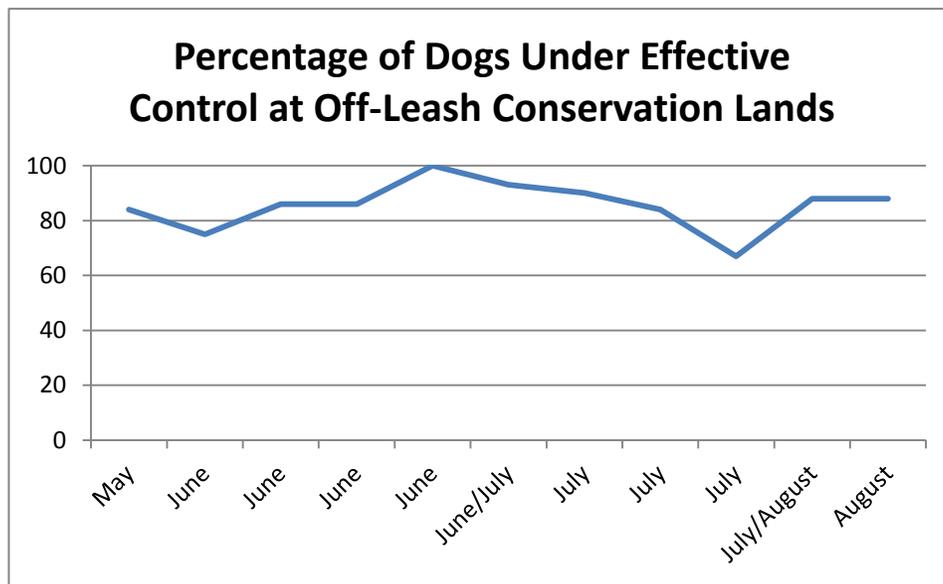


Figure 9: Percentage of dogs under effective control at off-leash conservation lands during summer months of 2018

There are several regulations that fall under the branch of “effective control.” These include such rules as: dogs must respond to their owners voice commands, dogs must stay on marked trails, dogs must be within sight at all times, and dogs are not permitted to chase, hunt, or harass people, wildlife, other dogs, horses, or livestock. Additionally, dog owners must always carry a leash for each dog they are walking, have a maximum of two dogs off-leash per person and three dogs total, leash their dog in parking areas until they reach a sign allowing unleashing, and leash up as they approach other trail users. The most commonly ignored regulation is owners leashing their dogs in parking areas when they arrive at trails or are returning to their vehicle after their walk. Many trail goers have expressed their concerns regarding this issue, stating that they cannot be sure whether a dog is friendly or not and that it makes them feel less comfortable on the trails. Figure 9 above depicts the percentage of dog walkers that maintained their dogs under effective control on off-leash conservation land

properties. Throughout the summer, approximately 85 percent of dog walkers kept their dogs under effective control at off-leash properties.

Dog Waste:

The proper disposal of dog waste on conservation lands is a concern to a large number of individuals who regularly walk Concord’s many accessible trails. It is the policy of the Division of Natural Resources that it is the duty of each person who owns, possesses or controls a dog to remove and dispose of any waste left by his or her dog while on Concord conservation land. At the start of each trail there are dog waste disposal bags that are provided by the town and used by almost every dog walker. Figure 10 below displays the number of bagged and un-bagged dog waste that was left on the trails this summer.

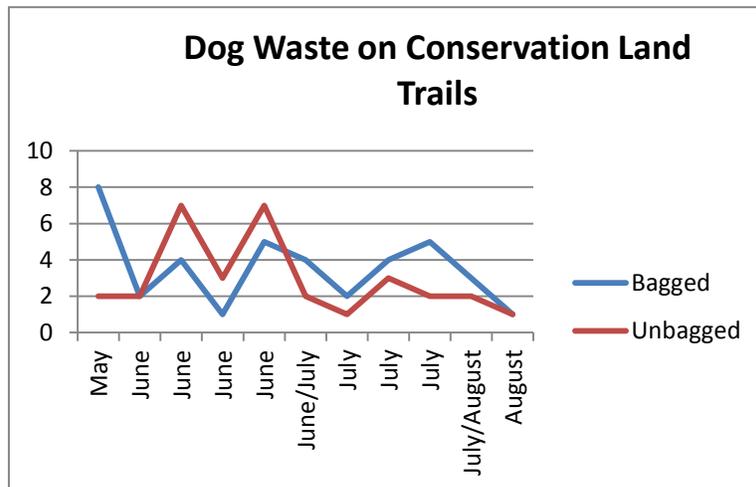


Figure 10: Dog Waste Found on Conservation Land (May 23- August 17)

Conclusion:

Data collected during the summer months of 2018 showed that nearly 80 percent of people are now walking their dogs on leash at all leash required properties. Additionally, approximately 90 percent of dog walkers have effective control of their dogs on off-leash lands. These numbers are a substantial improvement from the beginning of the summer. Furthermore, they have continued to trend upwards and display the effectiveness of the Ranger program. The vast majority of visitors to Concord conservation lands are now compliant with the NRC’s dog walking regulations.